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Thresholds: film as film and the aesthetic experience

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In this essay, I shall explore some ways in which certain ideas from psychoanalysis can shed light on the particular sort of aesthetic experience that cinema is capable of offering. I shall do this by making specific reference to some films, and also by offering a rereading of some of the writings of André Bazin on the ontology and phenomenology of film. The psychoanalytic concept I shall be drawing on principally is the *transitional object*. The idea of transitional objects (and, more broadly, transitional phenomena and transitional processes) was first developed by D.W. Winnicott, the foremost representative of the British Independent tradition of object-relations theory in psychoanalysis.

Transitional objects are the ubiquitous first possessions of infants and young children (a blanket or a teddy, for example) that belong at once to the child and to the outside world, and which occupy an intermediate position between fantasy and reality, the place of imagination. Winnicott famously said that 'no human being is free from the strain of relating outer and inner reality', and transitional objects and transitional phenomena help us negotiate that relationship.[1] They inhabit what Winnicott called an 'intermediate zone' between inner psychical reality and the external world, keeping the two separate but connected.

Importantly, transitional objects are precisely material objects, *things*: they have a physical existence, but at the same time they are pressed into the service of inner reality. They are at once part of the subject and not the subject. Winnicott uses the terms 'transitional space' and 'potential space' to refer to a third area, the intermediate zone inhabited by transitional phenomena. His spatial metaphors are, I think, significant, as is the sense that *movement*, a sort of psychical ebb and flow, marks the

subject's involvement with transitional phenomena. Aside from offering some fresh ideas on the phenomenology and metapsychology of the cinematic experience, the kind of object-relations dynamics condensed in the idea of transitional phenomena (which are not, or not just, personal or individual) have much to offer towards an understanding not only of what all human beings share (we all have to negotiate inner and outer realities; what may differ is the nature of our objects and of our relations with them), but also of how we might engage at a public level without setting aside our inner lives, and thus our emotions and psychical investments.

Winnicott's initial interest in transitional objects arose from his clinical work with babies and young children, and specifically from his observations of their uses of, and relations with, their objects. However, he immediately saw the potential of this concept for providing a broader understanding of how human beings inhabit and experience the area between inner and outer worlds, positing a developmental link from the earliest transitional phenomena and play (whose defining characteristics he regarded as preoccupation and near-withdrawal, with activity having the quality of being 'outside the individual but not the external world'), to shared play and finally to cultural experiences. All these activities involve objects or phenomena being drawn from the external world and pressed to an inner reality agenda.[2] It is clear, however, that Winnicott regards transitional phenomena as having a structural aspect as well as a developmental one; and this is where the relationship between transitional phenomena and how adults experience, and relate to, culture comes in.

In developmental terms, Winnicott links transitional objects and associated behaviours in infants and young children with processes of separation. For Winnicott, this means separation from the mother, but this can be broadened to include separation from mother-associated place-objects, such as the home: another of Winnicott's apparently simple – but in fact rather profound – dicta is 'Home is where we start from'.[3] In either case, mother or home, this is part of a process of development of self in distinction from the outside world, and it serves as a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, facilitating the child's acceptance of the new.

In structural terms, it is acknowledged that the dynamic equilibrium of inner and outer reality is not confined to the transitional objects of childhood, but continues in adult life. These processes are never completed, and we continue re-enacting play and other transitional processes throughout life in engagements with our 'adult' transitional phenomena. These are associated by Winnicott with culture in general ('there is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing ... to cultural experiences'),[4] including creative enjoyment of, or participation in, art and religion.

Here the inner–outer tension lies between living in the everyday, inhabiting ordinary consciousness, and leaving everyday consciousness

2 D.W. Winnicott, 'Playing: a theoretical statement', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Press, 1971), pp. 38–52. See also Robert M. Young, 'Potential space: transitional phenomena', http://www.shef.ac.uk/~psyc/mental/chap8.html

3 This became the title of a posthumous collection of Winnicott's essays, published in 1986 by Penguin.

4 Winnicott, 'Playing: a theoretical statement', p. 51. See also Winnicott, 'The use of an object and relating through identifications' (1968), in *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, pp. 218–27.

5 Winnicot, 'The location of cultural experience' (1967), in *Playing and Reality*, pp. 95–103, p. 100.

6 Christopher Bollas, 'The aesthetic moment and the search for transformation', in Peter L. Rudnytsky (ed.), *Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces: Literary Uses of D.W. Winnicott* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 40–49. In her discussion of the aesthetic moment, 'The role of illusion in symbol formation', in Rudnytsky (ed.), *Transitional Objects*, pp. 13–39, Milner references Berenson's *Aesthetics and History* (London: Constable, 1950).

7 Gilbert Rose, 'The creativity of everyday life', in S.A. Grolnick and L.S. Barkin (eds), *Between Reality and Fantasy: Winnicott's Concepts of Transitional Objects and Phenomena* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995). See also Werner Muensterberger, 'Between reality and fantasy', in Grolnick and Barkin (eds), *Between Reality and Fantasy*, pp. 5–13.

8 Rose, 'The creativity of everyday life'. See also Rose, *The Power of Form: a Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetic Form* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1980).

9 Winnicott, 'The location of cultural experience'; Marion Milner, 'Winnicott and the two-way journey' (1972), in *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 1987), pp. 246–52.

10 Milner, 'The role of illusion in symbol formation', p. 17.

to enter a zone of 'maximally intense experiences'.[5] One key issue is how we manage the transition between the two in our relation with cultural objects. The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas has discussed transitional processes in adult life in terms (borrowed from Bernard Berenson via Marion Milner) of an *aesthetic moment*:

> an occasion when time becomes space for the subject. We are stopped, held in reverie, to be released, eventually back into time proper.[6]

Another writer describes an 'ebb and flow of losing and refinding oneself personally and endlessly in space-time' that evokes the oscillation between 'clinging' and 'going exploring' that characterizes the child's relationship with its objects.[7]

The defining psychical/structural features of these engagements with transitional processes may be summed up as follows:

- They are part of the ongoing differentiation between inner and outer objects, between self and reality;
- They involve a temporary suspension of boundaries between self and objects;
- Transitional processes 'bridge' inner and outer realities;
- Transitional processes involve an oscillation, or a shifting of the boundaries, between inner and outer – as opposed to stable, fixed structures.[8]

It is significant, I think, that Winnicott considers subject–object relations in spatial terms. He also offers a visual illustration of his idea, citing a drawing of Milner's that conveyed to him the imaginational potential of the interplay of edges.[9] Extending the idea of transitional processes to the organization of space within and outside the edges of the film image, the film frame, I would argue, permits us to consider how film can engage us in a particular sort of aesthetic experience. A key concern in this context is the issue of what it is that makes film different from other visual media (painting, photography, television, for example); and an attention to the specifics of the film frame will, I think, help us answer this question.

According to Milner, 'The frame marks off the different kind of reality that is within it from that which is outside it'.[10] For Milner, the frame marks off the boundary between two worlds, or two realities as she puts it. We can think about this edge, and these realities, in several ways. The first that might spring to mind, perhaps, is the idea of the frame as bounding the 'real' world, with what is inside the frame being an image or a representation of what is outside it. However, by performing the mental gesture of getting inside the frame, it becomes possible to shift awareness, and to experience the frame as putting a border or boundary around the world *within the frame*, 'cutting out' that part of it that is revealed to us at any one moment inside the edges of the frame. Two points are worth bearing in mind here: firstly, that boundaries both

include and exclude; secondly, that boundaries are crossing points as well as borders or cutoff points.

Milner, a psychologist, psychoanalyst and amateur painter, as well as a colleague of Winnicott's, explores the 'aesthetic moment' as one of the defining facets of cultural experience. Citing Milner, Ellen Siegelman notes that 'In this "aesthetic moment" of being merged with the object of creation or contemplation we recapture the original illusion of fusion'.[11] The aesthetic moment, then, is characterized by a feeling of being, or becoming, at one with a work of art; and this entails a sensation of crossing over a boundary and entering into another kind of reality – and then returning 'home', renewed. In the aesthetic moment, the subject then becomes part of that reality, and that reality becomes part of the subject.

11 Ellen Siegelman, 'Playing with the opposites: symbolization and transitional space', in N. Schwartz-Salant and M. Stein (eds), *Liminality and Transitional Phenomena* (Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 1991), pp. 151–68.

This move can entail several kinds of involvement – *being, relating, knowing* – and I want now to look at these in relation to film. While these categories or states pre-exist cinema, bringing them to bear on cinema can help us understand how the experience of cinema works in its own ways. Philosophers have insights to offer on all three, but the starting point for the student of film always has to be *within the film frame*. If the concepts of *being, relating* and *knowing* are helpful, it is because they shed light on, and raise questions about, the experience of what might be called 'living within the frame'.

Being refers to ontological questions about the distinctive nature of film *as film*. By *relating* I have in mind questions about the nature of the encounter with film. *Knowing* refers, self-evidently, to the question of how we can know about *film*, and how we can understand *films*. On the question of knowing I have little to say here, except that I stand by Freud's dictum on the interpretation of dreams, that 'big things can show themselves by small indications'.[12]

12 Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1916–17)*, Pelican Freud Library, Volume 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 113.

Being, relating, knowing: these are fundamental issues; and, as they touch on film, now is a particularly good moment to be taking a fresh look at them. The rise of new digital moving-image technologies and media forces us to ask what film – the quintessential twentieth-century medium – *is*, and indeed what kind of future it has in the twenty-first century. In search of answers, I believe that we can usefully return to some of the twentieth-century thinkers and writers who tried to get to grips with the nature and the potential of what for them was as groundbreaking and excitingly novel as today's 'new media' are for us.

Among these thinkers is the film critic, and *Cahiers du cinéma* founding editor, André Bazin, who produced writings on film from around 1940 until his early death in 1958. Bazin sets out the grounds of his philosophy of film in a key essay, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', and on this rests his advocacy of certain films and types of cinema:

In [Stroheim's] films reality lays itself bare like a suspect confessing under the relentless examination of the commissioner of police. . . .

13 André Bazin, 'The evolution of the language of cinema', in *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 23–40, p. 27.

The camera cannot see everything at once but it makes sure not to lose any part of what it chooses to see[13]

Bazin has lately been rather out of fashion within Film Studies. However, faced by the challenges to the study of cinema posed by current changes in the medium, we can usefully go back to first principles and reflect anew on the distinctive nature of the aesthetic experience as it relates to film, and revisit Bazin with a fresh eye.

Bazin's approach to cinema, and the kinds of films he favoured, were informed by the context in which he was working – Paris during and immediately after World War II, when cinema was attracting the attention of intellectuals right across the board. In 1945, the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote an essay called 'Film and the new psychology'. This 'new psychology' was clearly different from those depth psychologies which explain human experience in terms of unconscious processes. It was different, too, from behavioural psychologies which reduce experience to outward behaviour. Rather, it was a philosophy that tried to capture experience as it is *lived*, by means of detached description of being-in-the-world and the world-in-us. Merleau-Ponty characterizes this existential approach to experience as:

> largely an expression of surprise at [the] inherence of the self in the world and in others, a description of this paradox and permeation, and an attempt to make us *see* the bond between subject and world, between subject and others.

He concludes:

14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Film and the new psychology', in *Sense and Non-sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 58.

> Well, the movies are particularly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other[14]

To reread Bazin in the context of intellectual currents in postwar France is to read him as a phenomenologist: it is to interpret his criticism as grounded in a view of the distinctiveness of cinema's *being* as resting on how the world inside the edges of the film frame reveals itself to us, and how we may enter into that world in the act of watching a film. Bazin was interested in getting to the very heart of cinema; in understanding its special qualities, its inherent nature, what makes film different; and in how the world on the cinema screen presents itself to us, engaging our being-in-the-world. What strikes one more than anything else about Bazin on rereading him today is the depth of his passion for film.

Although she is not referring to cinema, Milner succinctly captures this sense of passionate commingling between enquirer and object of enquiry that comes across so strongly in Bazin's writings on film when she writes: 'Knowing is no good unless you feel the urgency of the thing. Maybe this is love; your being becomes part of it, giving yourself to it.'[15] Bazin felt that within cinema's own way of being lay its particular aesthetic mission, or (and this is not putting it too strongly) its destiny.

15 Marion Milner, *A Life of One's Own* (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 224.

16 André Bazin, 'William Wyler, or the Jansenist of directing', in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1–22.

17 Ibid., p. 18.

18 Ibid., p. 9.

19 André Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', in *What Is Cinema?*, pp. 1–16, p. 16.

20 Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972).

He championed the kinds of films and cinemas he regarded if not as fulfilling that destiny then certainly as moving towards it. He felt that while film had a language of its own, some variants of that language, those that proceeded 'from an *aesthetics of reality*',[16] were truer to the destiny of film as film than others.

What did Bazin mean by 'an aesthetics of reality'? It is not, I think, about the relationship of cinema to some external object such as the 'real world' outside the film frame. Rather, it is an existential statement about film's capacity to convey a truth about the way its world engages us and the way we engage with its world. Elsewhere, Bazin writes: 'Cinema begins when the frame of the screen and the placement of the actor are used to enhance the action and the actor'.[17] What interests and even inspires him is evidently what lies *within the frame* – film as film; and the fact that a film's 'perfect neutrality and transparency of style'[18] makes a connection with the viewer's experience of the world.

That said, Bazin does employ the occasional shock tactic. The end of one of his earliest essays – on the photographic image – leaves us with a bald statement:

On the other hand, cinema is also a language.[19]

And so if his passion has to do with the particular kind of *experience* film offers, Bazin is also clear about how this works in terms of film language and style, and that within the frame we see at work film's own distinctive 'grammar': this includes such down-to-earth matters as composition and framing of the image, lighting, camera movement, editing. He believes that some usages of film language enhanced the medium's destiny while others detracted from it. A key area in this respect for Bazin clearly lies in the various ways in which film language can organize space (and, to a lesser degree, time). Bazin favours styles that free the viewer to remain aware of the whole frame (including its edges): to live within the frame, in other words.

Using terms like 'clarity' and 'stripping away', he appears to champion what has subsequently been called 'sparse' aesthetic means.[20] In terms of film grammar, one way of achieving this (though not the only one, as we shall see) is through what Bazin famously called the 'shot in depth'. This is shorthand for a combination of long takes, minimal editing, deep focus cinematography and static camera. The 'shot in depth', contends Bazin, respects the continuity and the duration of dramatic space. Bazin's advocacy of the 'shot in depth' is an advocacy of an organization of filmic space which permits a wider spread of awareness – and contemplation – of the image, both in itself and in relation to its boundaries, the edges of the frame.

Although Bazin was thinking and writing about cinema half a century ago, his approach to the film experience, as I have suggested, remains highly serviceable in the quest to understand cinema today, when the medium itself – as well as its contexts and uses – are not only very different from what they were in the 1940s and 1950s, but have also

acquired powerful rivals in the domain of the moving image and moving image technologies. In addressing fundamental issues about *being* and *relating*, Bazin was preoccupied with enduring questions about the frame which bounds the moving image, and about how what lies within the frame engages, draws in and impacts on the viewer.

I shall explore some of these issues by looking briefly at three films, including two relatively recent ones that I am certain Bazin would have regarded as fulfilling cinema's destiny, even though neither noticeably employs his favoured 'shot in depth'. Terence Davies's *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999) may be characterized as examples of what has been called 'social art cinema'. In their different ways, too, both explore what Davies has termed 'the poetry of the ordinary'.[21] *Ratcatcher* with an approach to the moving image which is rather modernist in its insistence on flatness, surface and texture; *Distant Voices, Still Lives* with an emphasis on the exploration of space (and time) through stasis, movement and duration of, and within, the frame. I shall also refer to Alexander Mackendrick's Ealing Studios film, *Mandy* (1951).

One of the key aspects of film's distinctive *being* is that the image moves – or, rather, it appears to. Objects move within the frame – a character crosses a room, perhaps; while the framing of the image itself – the edges of the frame – may seem to move as the camera tracks, pans, tilts, cranes, zooms in or out. Both types of movement obviously have implications for cinema's organization of both space *and* time, opening up possibilities unavailable to, say, (still) photography. In his essay on the ontology of the photographic image, Bazin argues that still photographs defend against death by snatching moments from the flow of time and freezing them. The photograph, in his resonant phrase, 'embalms time'.[22] Cinema, it might be added, then reanimates the frozen moment, bringing the dead to life; film's potentially unsettling play of stillness and movement reminding us of our own mortality.

I should like to extend the discussion about the distinctive cultural/ aesthetic *experience* of film – as this has to do with film's organization of stillness and movement, space and time – by proposing that this experience is capable of evoking a resonance, a sense of recognition of a truth, that can be visceral and, initially at least, outside words. Through its organization within the frame of space, time, stillness and motion, film is capable, I would suggest, of replaying or re-evoking certain states of being which are commonly experienced as inner. This, I would argue, is the site of the activity of transitional processes.

That film evokes inner, perhaps regressive, states is an idea that has been well explored, from one standpoint at least, in those branches of film theory that address film's engagement of unconscious processes, particularly those in which vision and looking are involved.[23] But it is something rather different that I am looking at here: processes which are not strictly unconscious, but are *preconscious*, in that they have to do

21 Christopher Williams, 'The social art cinema: a moment in the history of British film and television culture', in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp. 190–200; Martin Hunt, 'The poetry of the ordinary: Terence Davies and the social art cinema', *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 1–16.

22 Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', p. 14.

23 For an overview and critique of these from an object-relations standpoint, see Ira Konigsberg, 'Transitional phenomena, transitional space: creativity and spectatorship in film', *Psychoanalytic Review*, vol. 83, no. 6 (1996), pp. 865–89.

with the ways our inner worlds engage with external objects – and vice versa – and which involve not just – and sometimes not at all – looking, but which call into play more generalized mental/bodily states and activities. As indicated earlier, this negotiation of our inner and our outer worlds is something we all do all the time, though it has been studied in greatest depth in relation to childhood. To reiterate: in childhood, transitional spaces are engaged not through words but through engagement with objects (including 'transitional objects') and through play. For the adult, the equivalent transitional space is that of cultural experience, and it is the interaction of inner and outer in transitional phenomena that is at work in the ebb-and-flow experience of union that defines the 'aesthetic moment'.

While it was not consciously intended – and it might well, in fact, be a red herring – it is perhaps no coincidence that the three films discussed here are about childhood, or memories of childhood. For the child the home is a (or *the*) prime site for negotiating inner and outer worlds, and the home itself can take on the qualities of a transitional object and a transitional space, where *edges* – the boundaries and borders between inner and outer – assume considerable emotional and imaginational weight. I propose that in the quest to understand the particular kind of experience film offers, we can fruitfully explore these 'spaces between', these *thresholds*, as they figure in some of the ways films can organize liminal spaces – in my examples, the spaces of home and the boundaries between home and not-home.

In an essay on the infant's move away from the mother and towards the world outside, the psychoanalyst Anni Bergman emphasizes the importance of 'spaces of transition between a mother-world and a world outside. . . . Spaces such as windows, thresholds and doors . . . about which we can develop strong feelings'.[24] The opening sequence of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* brings into the space of the film frame the experience of home and its threshold precisely through its insistence on the home's liminal spaces:

24 Anni Bergman, 'From mother to the world outside: the use of space during the separation–individuation phase', in Grolnick and Barkin (eds), *Between Reality and Fantasy*, pp. 147–65, p. 149.

Shot 1   Black screen. Thunder is heard. Title: 'Distant Voices'. In voiceover, a radio shipping forecast is read;

Shot 2   Frontal MLS of a terraced house. It is raining. The shipping forecast continues in voiceover. Mother (Freda Dowie) comes out of the front door, picks up milk bottles and goes back indoors, closing the door;

Shot 3   As the shipping forecast continues, mother walks along the entrance hall and stops at the foot of the stairs, calling up to her children. After a while, she calls again: 'Better get your skates on'. Silence. Over static framing of empty staircase, sounds of feet descending and voices of three adult children greeting their mother; an *a capella* song starts: 'I get the blues

when it rains'. Camera begins a slow zoom in to staircase and then executes a slow circular pan around to front.

The first cut in this sequence (after shot 2) takes us to the other side of the front door and into the house. At a certain point in shot 3, there is a shift from an audiovisual naturalism (with sound and image readable as synchronous) to something less grounded: separation of sound (the mother's greeting each of her children) and image (lingering framing of empty stairs). We know where we are in terms of place, but what about *time*? Are we in the past or the present? A very marked camera movement (a combination zoom and 360-degree pan) brings us further inside the house, exploring the empty hallway, and then turning around to show the front door again, now seen *from inside* the hallway. After this, a dissolve to the same scene, sunlight streaming in through the now open door, will herald a further timeshift, to the day of the father's funeral. This punctuation and juxtaposition proposes that past and present are, first of all, contiguous and, secondly, joined together by the (remembered?) experience of home (here, significantly, the mother's house) and its threshold.

The sequence expresses in moving pictures and sounds the emotional significance of home and its thresholds, and associates the interplay of inside and outside spaces with the act of remembering. In its organization of space and time within the frame, it contrives not merely to narrativize memories, but to evoke the actual experience of remembering.

It is interesting in this regard to consider how the space of the house ('home') is set up in *Distant Voices, Still Lives* in relation to what is *not* home, how the boundary between home and outside figures in the film. Here, the threshold is the front door of the mother's house. It recurs throughout the film and is evidently highly invested.[25] In British cinema, the front doors of terraced houses in cities in the north of England hold a wealth of other meanings, and these are deepened by the idiosyncratic meanings of the front door in this particular film. Conventionally enough, the opening moments of the film present us with a view of the outside of a house, into which we are then admitted by means of a simple match cut. But by the close of the sequence, the front door figures as a rather different kind of entry point: not just to the space beyond the doorstep – which we see from inside the hallway (that still dominates the frame) as a narrow sliver of street – but also to another *time*. But if *Distant Voices, Still Lives* ventures into places outside 'home' – the pub, the pictures, the hospital – for major life events like weddings, christenings, funerals, accidents, and heightened experiences like visits to the cinema, it does not explore the spaces between them. This is very much an interior film, in every sense.

There are certain children's games that involve a zone of security that is called by the players 'home'. These games are about leaving this secure space and making yourself vulnerable to being caught and dismissed from

25 Phil Powrie engages the idea of threshold to consider how *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and other examples of the British 'alternative heritage film' call into question fixed notions of nationhood and national history: 'On the threshold between past and present: "alternative heritage"', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *British Cinema: Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 316–26.

26 Michael Balint, *Thrills and Regressions* (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 26 (Balint's emphasis).

27 Annette Kuhn, '*Mandy* and possibility', *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1991), pp. 233–43.

the game, 'out': blind man's buff, hide and seek, tig, musical chairs – and their computer-game equivalents. Outside 'home' lies a dangerous open space – real, virtual or imaginary – which has to be conquered with skill and daring. The thrill of the game lies in this risky venture into open, potentially insecure, terrain. But – and this is important – the game only works because players leave the zone of security in the confident hope that they can always return to it. In the words of the psychoanalyst Michael Balint: 'All thrills entail the *leaving* and *rejoining* of security'.[26] In an evocative turn of phrase, Balint calls the child's zone of risk 'friendly expanses'. Important here, once again, is what joins home and friendly expanses together – the boundary, and also *movement* across the space between, the space that joins and separates, 'home' and open space – the threshold. This movement is a *fort/da*, a repeated back-and-forth from safety to danger and back again. In this movement, home may be where we start from, but it is also the place we know we can go back to. In object-relations terms, this repeated movement is analogous to, and indeed rehearses in safety, the child's separation from mother, from 'home'.

Some years ago I wrote an essay on Alexander Mackendrick's 1951 Ealing Studios film, *Mandy*, the story of a deaf-mute child's struggle to learn to communicate.[27] One of the things that fascinated me about the film was an oddly insistent image of an open space, a piece of waste ground (actually a bombsite) lying behind the house where Mandy lives. The spatial relationship between house and waste ground (between 'home' and open space, if you like) shifts over the course of the film, marking the progress and development of the central character, Mandy. By contrast with *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, in *Mandy* home and open space are brought together through edits which insist on views of the spaces outside. But because these views are normally from the inside of the house, the open space is set up not just as beyond, but also as cut off from, the zone of security.

The waste ground appears four times in the film. On the first two occasions, it is shown initially from the angle of an upstairs window at the back of the house, though not from the optical point of view of any of the film's characters (figure 1). The backyard (where Mandy's mother stands holding her infant daughter) will figure as an important intermediate space (figures 2–4). Here, the third shot of the sequence (figure 4) shows the waste ground without intermediate spaces for the first time. It is seen from Mandy's point of view. She later ventures out into the open space and is nearly run over by a lorry: she is not yet ready to conquer the open space.

On its third appearance, the waste ground is seen from the viewpoint of Mandy's father, though this is revealed only at the end of the scene (figures 5–7). On this occasion, the boys (figure 6) approach her and she shrinks back, frightened now to risk leaving the 'zone of security'. On the waste ground's fourth and last appearance, the point of view is again Mandy's. She looks out of the upstairs window (figure 8) and sees the wasteground with children playing (figure 9). A little later a tracking

Fig.1 Fig.2 Fig.3 Fig.4 Fig.5 Fig.6 Fig.7 Fig.8 Fig.9 Fig.10

the intermediate space of the yard from the waste ground (figure 10), revealing Mandy in long shot from behind as she moves beyond the threshold between home (and 'home') and open space (now at last a

'friendly expanse'), and approaches the other children to join in their play. The film ends on this moment of triumph.

My earlier reading of the waste ground was that it figures centrally in Mandy's quest to move beyond the family and to make contact with other children. I have since made some discoveries that both reinforce this reading and explain how, in terms of the *experience* of film, the waste ground scenes may be read as a working over of the human quest to relate outer and inner realities. Paradoxically, Mackendrick, who made a number of films with children as central characters, rarely set up shots from the viewpoint of child characters.[28] It follows that when these do appear, as in the second and fourth appearances of the waste ground in *Mandy*, something significant is afoot. Furthermore, the ways in which the shots of the waste ground figure in *Mandy*, and how these incorporate – or do not incorporate – characters in the film, are suggestive of the varied ways in which different kinds of space – here those of home, threshold and open ground – can be organized and orchestrated through the language of cinema (image composition, editing, angle, point of view and finally camera movement). This in turn keys into a broader consideration of the emotional, psychological, and cultural meanings of the space of home in relation to thresholds, and of the relation of both to the spaces beyond; and also about meaning of passages between the two, both in 'reality' and in imagination and reverie.

What I would propose is that one of the distinctive features of film's organization of space within the frame and its play of stasis and movement is its capacity to express and evoke – at the levels of feeling and memory – highly invested objects, spaces and passages, in particular those which have to do with the task of negotiating inner and outer worlds. This idea perhaps sheds some light on the complex and enigmatic film, *Ratcatcher*.

In *Ratcatcher*, set in Glasgow during a dustmen's strike in the 1970s, the street and the yard outside the tenement home of the film's main character, James, figure in some ways similarly to the waste ground in *Mandy*. There are a number of shots of these spaces from inside house windows, taken from the viewpoint of James and of other characters, as well as some which are similarly composed, but which appear not to be motivated by the look of any character. In both films, the window figures as a particular kind of threshold: two spaces, inside and out, are joined together by the eye, by looking (Figures 11–14). With their piles of rotting rubbish and their general dereliction, the open spaces that adjoin James's home share something, too, of the quality of the bombsite in *Mandy*. In other respects, though, they invite different interpretations, and these do not stem solely from the different meanings of war debris as against household rubbish, the 1950s as against the 1970s.

Unlike *Mandy* (and indeed *Distant Voices, Still Lives*), *Ratcatcher* has a proliferation of thresholds. 'Home' is the space inside James's family's tenement flat – or is it? The film's rendering of the architecture of the

28 Philip Kemp, *Lethal Innocence: the Cinema of Alexander Mackendrick* (London: Methuen, 1991).

Ratcatcher (Lynne Ramsay, 1999).

tenement building, where the common stairway is experienced (and used) as both inside and outside, makes the precise location of the edges of 'home' uncertain; and besides stairways, inner and outer doorways (doors to the flats, entrances to the yard and the street) also figure as thresholds in the film. But these are ambiguous spaces: they imply a rather complex zone of transition, even a dangerous permeability, between 'home' and the adjacent open spaces – the street, the tenement yard, the canal. The complexity of the organization of these spaces within the film frame lends them an ambiguous tone, an uncertainty as to where – *pace* Balint – the secure and the risky begin and end.

This ambiguity is reinforced by the film's insistence on another, and rather different, kind of open space – that of the new house, which James dreams will some day be his and his family's, and the golden cornfield behind it. This appears three times in the film. Unlike the film's other open spaces, though, this one is set up as spatially divorced from 'home'; that is, there is no threshold, ambiguous or otherwise. Although the first two appearances of the field are prefaced by passages of travel (by bus), the geography of the space between is not set out, and on the third occasion, there is no spatial link at all. The point is precisely that there is no threshold, nor any easy passage, between 'home' and this other open space, which therefore never becomes a 'friendly expanse' in Balint's sense.

Although this observation might suggest a way in to interpreting the enigmatic third appearance of the cornfield at the end of the film (which also offers an illuminating counterpoint with the closing scene of *Mandy*), there is a good deal more that could be said about the cornfield scenes and the kinds of open spaces they present. What, for instance, is to

Ratcatcher (Lynne Ramsay, 1999).
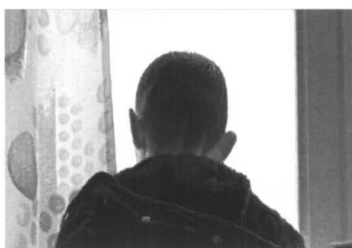
be made of the highly marked, and highly distinctive, reappearance of the window motif in all three? Perhaps what is proposed in *Ratcatcher* are several kinds of home and open space, several kinds of threshold, more than one way of separating from home and venturing into the open spaces beyond – and more than one way of negotiating inner and outer worlds. The route between inner and outer realities is severed.

Both *Mandy* and *Ratcatcher* are films about children and childhood (and *Distant Voices, Still Lives* is an evocation of childhood memories). Because of this, their spatial configurations of home and not-home, and of thresholds, are easily read off onto plot and character, specifically onto the quests facing their child protagonists. This is the red herring referred to earlier: for while this is certainly not an inaccurate reading, it is reductive in the degree that it ignores the ways in which these films – and cinema in general – are able to evoke the very structure of feeling, the experience, of such quests through their organization of space(s) and movement within the film frame.

At the same time, the subject matter of these films is not entirely contingent. They succeed in the degree that their stories, recruiting a child's-eye view on the world, re-evoke for the adult viewer the experience of being (as well as of having been) a child. This is not necessarily a question of nostalgia, as Elisabeth Bronfen suggests in her discussion of Hollywood films that deal with themes of 'home',[29] partly because story contents are not really the point. Something bigger is at stake, and this is the capacity of certain types of cinema, through distinctive 'language' and expressive potential, to evoke the experiences that are fundamental to some of the processes through which we become human beings; or, as Robert M. Young puts it, to 'give one back one's familiar experiences with additional illumination'.[30] Cinema can be, or be like, a transitional phenomenon. This is the secret of cinephilia.

29 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Home in Hollywood: the Imaginary Geography of Cinema* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 21.

30 Young, 'Potential space: transitional phenomena'.

Dropping the mask: theatricality and absorption in Sáenz de Heredia's *Don Juan*

SARAH WRIGHT

1 For Sáenz de Heredia's early collaborations with Buñuel see Roger Mortimore, 'Buñuel, Sáenz de Heredia and Filmófono', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1974–5), pp. 180–2.

2 Sáenz de Heredia was the cousin of the martyred founder of the Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera.

3 Javier Memba, 'José Luis Sáenz de Heredia: El Leni Riefhsteald [sic] de Franco', *El Mundo*, 5 November 1992, p. 10.

4 Ángel Fernández Santos 'Muere José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, el máximo cineasta del franquismo militante', *El País*, 5 November 1992, p. 36 (all translations mine).

5 Susan Martín Márquez, *Feminist Discourse and Spanish Cinema: Sight Unseen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 89.

6 Cinematography was by Alfredo Fraile, music by Manuel Parada, script by Carlos Blanco and José Luis Sáenz de Heredia.

Don Juan exists in the popular imagination as the legendary seducer of women, charismatic rogue, trickster and transgressor of sacred boundaries. As a potent icon of uncontained male sexual energy, he promiscuously crosses cultures, from east to west, whilst his only constancy is his continued presence in a global cultural heritage which serves to link the past with the present. As an iconoclast, liar, libertine and marriage-breaker, he may seem a curious choice of subject for José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, who, despite early collaborations with the rebellious Luis Buñuel,[1] is best known for his allegiance to the Franco regime, a loyalty that would continue long after the death of the dictator.[2] Sáenz de Heredia, described in obituaries as the Leni Riefenstahl of Franco's Spain[3] and the 'greatest auteur of militant Francoism' (*máximo cineaste del franquismo militante*),[4] produced the Fascist epic *Raza/ Race* (1941) based on a script allegedly drafted by General Franco himself. The film showcases the victorious triumphalism and reactionary gender typologies of National Catholicism, whilst the racial characteristics of the Spanish nation of the film's title 'are defined in large part ... through an obsessive insistence on sexual purity'.[5] *Don Juan* (Cifesa, Chapalo Films, 1950)[6] was made at the height of Franco's powers, when state censorship snipped, erased, inscribed and rewrote all artistic production in order to promote Francoist family values, the sanctity of marriage and the monolithic law of church and state. *Don Juan* was endorsed by the censors, declared a 'triumphant success' by Francoist press and propaganda, and awarded the National Interest Prize,

7 The Cine Avenida, Avda. de José Antonio, now Gran Vía, opened in 1928 as a theatre and in 1929 as a cinema with 1632 seats (later reduced to 1576). Pascual Cebollada and Mary G. Santa Eulalia, *Madrid y el cine* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 2000), p. 239.

8 Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 51.

9 1553 places the setting within the empire of the reign of Carlos V, grandson of the 'Catholic Monarchs' Ferdinand and Isabella. It was the date of Bartolomé de las Casas's 'Treatise Confining the Sovereign Empire and Universal Princedom that the Kings of Castile and Leon pursue over the Indians'. 1553 was also the date of publication of the first Spanish Old Testament, the Ferrara Bible.

10 Luis de Pedrola, 'La legendaria figura de Don Juan en una magnífica película española', *Cámara*, no. 186 (1950), pp. 10–11. It is worth noting that the cast is international, including the film's protagonist, Vilar, who is Portuguese, but repeatedly referred to in press publicity as 'Iberian'.

11 A.P., 'Don Juan, el personaje español famoso en todo el mundo, en una grandiosa superproducción nacional', *Cámara*, no. 187 (1950), pp. 44–5.

12 Anon., '"Don Juan", realización cumbre de Sáenz de Heredia, triunfa en el cine Avenida', *Ya*, 17 October 1950, p. 6. For a comparison of Sáenz de Heredia's *Don Juan* and the Errol Flynn vehicle, see Jo Labanyi, 'Impossible love and Spanishness: *Adventures of Don Juan* (Vincent Sherman, 1949) and *Don Juan* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1950), in Federico Bonaddio and Xon de Ros (eds), *Crossing Fields in Modern Spanish Culture* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), pp. 146–54. Labanyi notes that Sáenz de Heredia's film was a direct riposte to Sherman's epic and contains many overt references to the other film.

13 A pamphlet entitled, *The Spanish Cinema*, Madrid: Diplomatic Information Office, 1950, advertises the strong filmmaking

a classification which guaranteed it wide publicity and distribution in prime exhibition theatres (the film opened in the Cine Avenida, Gran Vía, the heart of Madrid's public leisure space) as well as a healthy return on production costs.[7]

The mid 1940s to early 1950s saw the birth of a national cinema in Spain as a 'deliberate project undertaken by the dictatorship',[8] and witnessed a plethora of high-production-value adaptations of the classics, which appropriated literary or historical figures as vehicles to endorse the principles of empire, family and church and provide the setting for Francoist ideology to appear to stretch back into a seamless past. For example, *Alba de América/Dawn of America* (Juan de Orduña, 1950) depicted Columbus's voyage to the Americas; *Locura de Amor/Mad with Love* (Juan de Orduña, 1948) told the epic story of Queen Joan the Mad; *La Leona de Castilla/Lioness of Castille* (Juan de Orduña, 1951) concerned the sixteenth-century Comuneros' revolt; *Bambú* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1945) was an ode to Spanish imperialism. *Don Juan* is a lavish costume drama, a 'magnificent national super-production' (*grandiosa superproducción nacional*), a glamorous antidote to the years of poverty which had continued since the end of the civil war in 1939. The setting of the film in Seville, 1553, emphasizes aspects of Spanish heritage connected with a golden age of empire, conquest and religious crusade.[9] Contemporary press reviews highlight the 'Spanishness' of the figure of Don Juan, a 'character of truly Spanish temperament' (*personaje de españolísimos rasgos temperamentales*)[10] and stress that whilst the figure has been appropriated by many different nations, each trying to 'adapt it to their own geography' (*aclimatarlo a su geografía*), Don Juan can be achieved in its exact dimensions (*dimensión exacta*) only in Spain.[11] These articles map the contours of a national pride, elided with the figure of Don Juan, implicitly eschewing the Hollywood vehicle *The Adventures of Don Juan*, (Vincent Sherman, 1949) starring Errol Flynn as a pale imitation of the Spanish incarnation, which is the 'only authentic Don Juan, out of the many that have been attempted in other countries' (*el único auténtico de los muchos que se han intentado en otros paises*).[12] But it is precisely Don Juan's internationalism that makes him such an important figure for an industry which was still hopeful of establishing a *niche* with films that would appeal in international markets as well as compete with Hollywood in domestic spheres.[13] Like a wayward prodigal son, returning after a long journey through foreign lands, Don Juan is gathered back into the Spanish fold.

Furthermore, if we trace a genealogy of Don Juan through a Spanish literary heritage, we find that Sáenz de Heredia's choice of theme is far from unorthodox. The canonical version by Tirso de Molina is a supernatural morality tale featuring Don Juan as the archetypal *dissoluto punito*, the rake punished for his misdemeanours by a horrible ending in the bowels of hell. José Zorrilla's romantic revision offers a pious lesson in Christian redemption.[14] Sáenz de Heredia's adaptation pays homage to both versions (whilst coquettishly declaring fidelity to neither); his

talent to be found in Spain, and encourages foreign filmmakers to make films in Spain, foregrounding the high quality films made on low budgets and highlighting the production of *valca*, a Spanish-made 'raw' film.

14 Tirso de Molina, *El burlador de Sevilla y el convidado de piedra/ The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* (c. 1630); José Zorrilla, *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844).

15 Censorship laws would not be formalized until 1964, but the regulations of 1964 state quite clearly that adultery and illicit sexual relations must not be portrayed as justified in any way. See the 'Normas de censura cinematográfica', *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 58 (8 March 1963). My thanks to Catherine Maynooth for providing me with a copy of this material.

16 Now generally used as a pejorative term to refer to Spanish films which focus on local customs, folklore and stereotyped characters within an Andalusian setting. Triana-Toribio, in *Spanish National Cinema*, pp. 62–5, provides an excellent discussion of the debates for and against the *españolada* during the 1940s and 1950s in Spain. For some commentators, *españolada* came to connote low-quality filmmaking in Spain. According to Triana-Toribio's definitions, *Don Juan* could be seen as a 'highbrow *españolada*'. The trampling of a red carnation into the ground by Don Juan could be seen as the perceived triumph of literary over folkloric 'Spanishness' as presented in this film.

17 Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 3.

18 Ibid., p. 253.

chosen ending emphasizes the redemptive potential of the myth. Nevertheless, the film devotes significantly more screen-time to a capricious revelling in the sexual and moral transgressions of our charismatic hero, remedied by a hasty Christian rebirth at the end of the film.[15] This rapid shift in theme is signalled by a switch in genre – from a cheerful comedy of errors, interspersed with swashbuckling scenes and episodes of *españolada*,[16] the film moves into melodrama, a tearjerker of the first order.

In this essay, I focus on the tensions offered by this film in terms of its abrupt change of genre, pace and theme, and reflect on the effects of these on spectatorship. My access to the film is on video, in the *Clásico español* series, which means being aware of attendant changes in mode of consumption and control over the pace, sequence and repetition of the visual events. This may also serve as a reminder of the fixed temporality and totalizing claims of classical cinema spectatorship. Moreover, the slippage between past and present which the graininess of the film inevitably evokes, may make any attempt to account for viewing practices in this film seem a quixotic gesture, a mere act of 'nostalgic contemplation'. Yet, as Miriam Hansen has observed, 'now that cinematic spectatorship is becoming sufficiently contaminated with other modes of film consumption, we can trace more clearly its historically and theoretically distinct contours'.[17] Pamphlets by Spanish Catholic commentators on cinema spectatorship from the period provide insights on the power and pleasure accorded cinema in the 1950s and the ways that it was depicted as a struggle between willpower and unconscious desires, intelligence and dupery, pious doctrine and Hollywood glamour. Two modes of looking and receiving cinema are brought into play: one based on distance from the visual event, the other grounded in identification, closeness and absorption in the image.

In the light of this dialectic, I address viewing praxis in *Don Juan* and suggest that an ideal spectatorship depends upon a move from theatricality (which engineers a form of distance from the image) during the sequences which focus on Don Juan's sexual and moral misdemeanours, towards a closeness, identification and absorption during the sequences which deal with Don Juan's Christian redemption. The film is contextualized by interviews, reviews, studio publicity and articles in fan magazines, 'sources that at once document, manipulate and constitute its reception'.[18] Whilst the film is seen to enunciate an ungendered (but structurally male) subject position for the viewer, I explore the ways in which diegesis interlocks with publicity material to acknowledge the presence of a female consumer, using the glamour of the star system to promote 'spectacular moments' of rapt contemplation towards the male as erotic object. This modern mode of idolatry is then seen to be profitably inserted within a history of beholding reserved for devotional painting. Cinema hijacks the glamour of the star system and turns it towards more pious goals. The film's packaging as a love-story eases the narrative and generic transition from comedy of errors to

melodrama. Drawing on Michael Fried, I explore the ways in which the melodramatic mode permits the full absorption of the spectator into the field of the image: the desire of the spectator is realigned with the dominant ideological positions which cinema may facilitate.

In the final section, I examine the tensions evoked by this film, and reflect on the opportunities offered the spectator to resist an 'ideal spectatorship' and find pleasure in viewing outside of the demands of Francoist ideology.

Seductions in the dark

For Fascist ideologue Ernesto Giménez Caballero, writing in 1944, cinema is like a feverish Don Juan (*un Don Juan delirante*), producing uncontrollable progeny (*descendencia incontrolada*). He speaks of the kilometres of film reels which wind around ancient literary themes, like unending serpents. Mixing metaphors, he claims that films flower for a day before lying, trodden into the ground, like putrefied weeds (*maleza de putrefacción*).[19] Giménez Caballero is one of a series of cultural commentators, most of them Catholic counsellors, who wrote about the negative effects of cinema spectatorship during Franco's regime. On examining this writing on spectatorship from the period, we find a sense that if cinema is like a delirious Don Juan, then the spectator is a vulnerable, passive victim, susceptible to screen seductions, in the darkness of the auditorium.[20] Thus Miguel Siguan writes of the solitary pleasure (*placer solitario*) which is cinema, where the audience is plunged into darkness, causing the spectator to forget those around him or herself.[21] For Gutiérrez Egido, writing in a pamphlet whose cover features a cross with film-reels winding threateningly around its base, darkness itself has a magic power: '*qui male agit. Odit lucem*', he warns, 'evil is a friend of darkness'.[22] Siguan writes that the largest group tolerated by cinema is the romantic couple who can find protection for their desired intimacy in the shadows of the auditorium.[23] Otherwise, the cinema public is not a mass but a group of solitary beings who hold up no resistance, whose defences are down, who are hypnotized, dreaming, passive and dominated by the magical and subjugating eye which is the screen (*este ojo mágico y subjugador que es la pantalla*).[24]

The perceived danger presented by cinema is that the spectator appears to become absorbed by the screen-images. In a state of susceptibility, the spectator is open to the influence of cinema (Siguan compares it to hypnosis, opium or alcohol) which leaves a mark (*huella*) which can have an effect on behaviour. Of particular concern is the enticement cinema offers to imitate behaviour. Thus José Manuel Vivanco is concerned with the portrayal of love, the kiss and the caress in the cinema, as well as the representation of marriage, home and divorce, vice, virtue and materialism on screen.[25] Of especial concern to many writers is the effect of screen images on children and adolescents.

19 Ernesto Giménez Caballero, 'El cine y la cultura humana', *Conferencia de la Universidad de Madrid* (Bilbao: Tipografía Hispano-Americana, 1944), p. 29.

20 In an attempt to account for spectatorship in the 1950s, I include material in my study dating from 1944 to 1960.

21 Miguel Siguan, *El cine, el amor y otros ensayos* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1956), p. 15.

22 Ernesto Gutiérrez del Egido, *¡¡Conquistemos el cine!!: Hacia una solución total y acertada del problema cinematográfico* (Ávila: Gloria, 1946), p. 17.

23 Siguan, *El cine, el amor y otros ensayos*, p. 15.

24 Ibid., p. 19.

25 José Manuel Vivanco, *Moral y pedagogía del cine* (Madrid: Ediciones Fax, 1952).

26 José Luis García Escudero, *El cine y los hijos* (Madrid: Esse, 1959).

27 Juan García Yagüe, *Cine y juventud* (Madrid: CSIC, 1953), p.191.

28 Siguan, *El cine, el amor y otros ensayos*, p. 32.

29 Anon., *¿Sabes ir al cine?* (Madrid: Talitha, 1960), p. 7.

30 Ibid., p. 3.
31 Juan Gil-Albert, *Contra el cine* (Valencia: Tip. Artística, 1955), p. 14.
32 García Escudero, *El cine y los hijos*, p. 83.
33 Siguan, *El cine, el amor y otros ensayos*, p. 23.
34 Anon., *¿Sabes ir al cine?*, p. 1.

35 Ibid., p. 41.

36 Ibid.

37 A. Garmendía de Otaola, *Estética y ética del cine: Guía para cines y cineclubs* (Bilbao: Gráficas Ellecuria, 1956).

38 Anon., *¿Sabes ir al cine?*, p.1.

39 Ibid.

For example, García Escudero examines the link between cinema and behaviour in terms of adolescent delinquency and eroticism,[26] whilst Juan García Yagüe draws on French empirical research to compile an inventory of gestures, behaviours and dress-styles which have been copied from cinema, which include 'kissing chastely and anxiously' (*dar besos con limpieza y ansiedad*), 'a man who was smoking' and 'being Rita Hayworth'.[27] Siguan writes that the girl who goes to a night-time party for the first time carries with her like baggage the memory of all the parties she has seen on screen and which have left a mark on her 'toilette' and on her mannerisms and gestures, the way she dances and, above all, on her behaviour with a potential partner.[28] A pamphlet tells the morality tale of a girl in Italy who was so influenced by the cinema that she ran away from home (it cites films with Joan Crawford, which encourage young women to have independent lives), only to be found later as a corpse.[29]

Repeatedly, these articles stress the fictitiousness of the cinema. It is lies (*mentira*),[30] deception (*engaño*),[31] it presents a false vision of the world,[32] an artificial paradise.[33] At the same time, cinema is linked with eroticism, and screen seductions cause lasciviousness. For these writers, censorship is not uniformly reliable as a filter for negative images. The cinema also has mass appeal, being naturalized by Spanish citizens into a regular fixture of the week's activities.[34] Thus, in the face of the overarching mass power of cinema, these writers urge that members of the public be educated in cinema, strengthening (*fortaleciendo*) their personalities and their sense of responsibility,[35] in order to learn to distinguish between positive and negative images. The intelligent aficionado, the member of a film club, is less in danger of being seduced by the screen because he adopts a less passive position.[36] Active resistance to absorption by the filmic image can be achieved through an understanding of cinematic techniques. In this vein, Garmendía de Otaola provides a guide to the aesthetics of cinema (explaining shots, sound, dialogue, lighting, colour and photography) as well as its ethics.[37] A pamphlet entitled *¿Sabes ir al cine?/Do You Know How to Go to the Cinema?* appeals to the intelligence of the female spectator.[38] 'Of course I know how to go to the cinema!' (*Naturalmente sé ir al cine*), it begins:

> when I go to the hairdresser's I read all the magazines there, besides the one my friend Clara buys – she's the one who's really enthusiastic about the lives of the stars. I'm sure that if the poor thing weren't so ugly she would enter one of those competitions to find new faces in Spanish cinema. Her dream is to be a star.[39]

After separating its target reader from her fictional friend Clara, who is duped by the cinema, and above all by the bright lights of the star-system, it urges, 'it's one thing to go to the cinema and another to KNOW how to go' (*una cosa es ir al cine y otra SABER ir*). It exhorts the reader to 'learn

to put the filter of your intelligence between your senses, doped by the image and colour, and your soul':

> In each film, seek out the IDEA of its creator, the message that the film is trying to communicate. Don't enter into the advertiser's game. Go to the cinema *intelligently* and think and talk about it intelligently.[40]

40 Ibid.

Furthermore, it warns, 'Distrust. This should be your first position. Distrust your senses (*Desconfianza de los sentidos*). And apply intelligence to the film' (*Y aplicación de la inteligencia sobre la película*).[41] Intelligence, then, becomes a form of distrust or distancing from the spectacular resources employed by cinema, achieved through observation of the film's ideological message. The anonymous writer of this pamphlet therefore provides a model for a form of Catholic spectatorship, in which an intelligent reading of film provides the necessary distance required to neutralize the threat of absorption in the image.

41 Ibid., p. 5.

The case of *Don Juan*

Synopsis
Seville, 1553. A dying man asks for a royal pardon for his son, Don Juan, who has been exiled to Italy. Don Juan returns to Spain with his faithful manservant Ciutti. During the voyage home he meets Lady Ontiveros, a married English noblewoman with whom he begins an 'open' relationship. On arrival in Seville, he is brought news of the death of his father and of the conditions of his inheritance: he must marry Doña Inés, daughter of Don Gonzalo. Don Juan lies, declaring that he is already married, and continues with his multiple seductions. Later, upon hearing that Dona Inés is to attend a popular fair, he arranges for bandits to create a stampede of bulls. In the ensuing chaos, he kidnaps Doña Inés. There she convinces him not to seduce her, and, as she tells him of her religious faith, he starts to fall in love with her. When Don Gonzalo arrives, he is killed by Don Juan. Doña Inés swears that she wishes to enter a convent. When Don Juan tells Lady Ontiveros of his love for Doña Inés she betrays him to the guards. As he dies, Don Juan swears his love of God.
Theatricality
The film opens with the credits being shown over a series of scenes from the film, a trailer of dissolving *tableaux vivants* which cross-cut sword-fights with scenes of Don Juan's multiple seductions. The first of these scenes is a closeup of the face of Antonio Vilar playing the lead, Don Juan, wearing a mask which covers most of his face. Vilar's hands can be seen on either side of the frame to pull up the mask as the film's title, *Don Juan*, appears across his newly revealed face. The mask in the image is motivated by the mise-en-scene of the sequence from which it is taken: a masked ball at carnival time. Masquerade is also present as a visual and thematic 'hook' throughout the main body of the film as we witness

Don Juan as masquerade.
Don Juan (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1950).
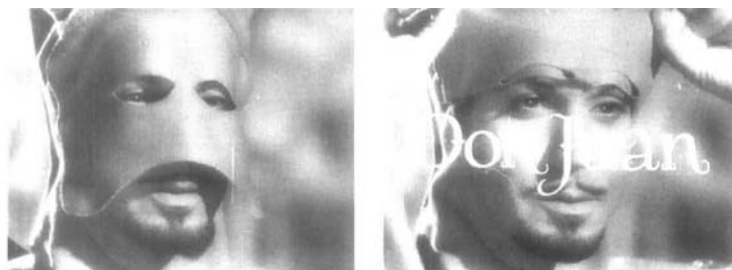
42 My reading of Don Juan's masquerade is indebted to Mary Ann Doane's study of the femme fatale, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996).

43 Homi Bhabha, 'The other question', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1983), pp. 18–35.

44 Marañón was famous for his description of the aging Don Juan. See, for example, 'La vejez de Don Juan', in Gregorio Marañón, *Obras Completas*, Volume I (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1966), pp. 437–44.

45 Gregorio Marañón, *Don Juan: Ensayos sobre el origin de su leyenda* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1942). Marañón classified Don Juan on the 'feminine' scale of his schema of intersexuality (he possesses 'feminine' traits), which chimes with Joan Rivière's interest in 'intermediate types' in her discussion of the masquerade. Whilst Rivière speaks only of 'womanliness' as masquerade, she introduces the possibility of masquerading homosexual men. Chris Holmlund, reminding us that Lacan states that men can 'have' the phallus just as little as women can ever 'be' it, advances the theory of male masquerade in her 'Masculinity as multiple masquerade: the 'mature' Stallone and the Stallone clone', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 213–29. See also Joan Rivière, 'Womanliness and the masquerade (1929)', in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 35–44.

Don Juan's manifold conquests, involving cases of mistaken identity, lies, tricks and subterfuges. The alignment of Don Juan with masquerade at the start of the film flamboyantly posits Don Juan as an enigma.[42] The film will propose plot-driven resolutions to open-ended questions of Spanish masculinity, questions which derive from a pro-filmic 'scene' outside of the diegesis. Furthermore, the film highlights theatricality as trope: an element which extends beyond the stagy elements of the plot and mise-en-scene and into cinematic resources and spectatorship.

If masquerade is about who is looking and the looker's specific discursive formation in a given historical juncture,[43] then by examining the publicity material surrounding the film and its interlocking with diegetics we are reminded that *Don Juan* inserts itself into a heritage of literary, medical and philosophical theories which centre on the figure of the Spanish seducer. Whilst the stagy titles at the beginning of the film inform us that this version will borrow from both Tirso and Zorrilla, but be faithful to neither, the reverent wordiness of the script (by Carlos Blanco) likewise serves to remind us of the film's literary origins. An article in *ABC*, meanwhile, notes the homage to Spanish physician Gregorio Marañón, when Don Juan asks his faithful sidekick Ciutti if he has grown any grey hairs.[44] Marañón, whose volume on Don Juan was published in 1942, was infamous for his 'queering' of Don Juan (a phenomenon which became aligned in Spanish public discourse to questions of effeminacy).[45] Sáenz de Heredia invited Marañón to attend a private screening of the film, which the doctor reportedly disliked.[46] But in his invocation of Marañón, Sáenz de Heredia was opening up an old debate in Spanish public discourse, an unresolved tension concerning the sexuality of the archetypal Spanish lover. In publicity shots for the film, Vilar appears resplendent in (feminizing) *accoutrements*: tights, ruff at the neck and cuffs, lavish buckles, a cape and sword. In an interview accompanying such a picture, Vilar offers an ironic detachment to his attire: 'I can't imagine Don Juan with those clothes in our time, fighting for space on the running board of a tram'.[47] Press coverage, meanwhile, fetishizes Vilar's beard, associating it with manliness – we learn that Vilar cut himself while shaving, and that Carlos Nin, responsible for makeup, will have to work hard to cover up the scar.[48] Another piece, meanwhile, records that Vilar attended a concert in spite of his embarrassment at displaying his 'beard and sideburns' (*barba y*

46 Sáenz de Heredia remarks,
'Marañón told me absolutely that
he didn't like it. I answered that I
didn't like his version either', in
Juan Julio de Abajo de Pablo, *Mis
charlas con José Luis Sáenz de
Heredia* (Valladolid: Quiron
Ediciones, 1996), p. 58.

47 Anon., 'El personaje que Usted ha
interpretado en el cine ¿sería en la
segunda mitad del siglo igual que
ha sido antes?', *Primer Plano*,
31 December 1950.

48 Anon., 'Primer desafío a sangre de
Don Juan con su navaja de
afeitar', *Primer Plano*,
23 April 1950.

49 Anon., 'Barba va, barba viene',
Primer Plano, 18 March 1950.

50 Anon., *Primer Plano*, 23 May 1950;
Primer Plano, 28 May 1950.

51 Anon., *Primer Plano*,
29 October 1950.

52 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*,
p. 282.

platillas).[49] Vilar is portrayed as all-round Renaissance man: aside from attending concerts he reads long psychological tracts to help him sleep, speaks several languages, is a 'gentleman' (*caballero*), holds cocktail parties for the press and is a 'great friend, excellent father and marvellous husband' (*gran amigo, excelente padre y maravilloso marido*).[50] This is far removed from the star publicity surrounding Errol Flynn for his Don Juan vehicle, which repeatedly describes Flynn as a womanizer in his real life who, although not reported here, had been tried on statutory rape charges.[51] Referents external to the film therefore inscribe a distance between Vilar and his role whilst the suggestion of Don Juan's effeminacy alluded to by his sumptuous costume is steadfastly ascribed to theatricality. Within the film, Don Juan's costume is authorized and naturalized in contrast to the comedy cow-suit worn by a rival at the masked ball. Moreover, at the level of plot, Don Juan's heterosexuality is reinforced: he is saved by the love of a good woman. The threat implicit in all of this dressing up and posturing on the part of Don Juan is the implication that masculinity, like Don Juan, is no more than a masquerade, a series of empty accoutrements to gender. But this tension will also be 'resolved' (however heavy-handedly) at the level of plot. The association of Don Juan with emptiness, through the masquerade (the mask which disguises a lack), leaves the way clear for the suggestion of wholeness and plenitude (beneath the mask is a soul) associated with the redemptive, religious Don Juan at the end of the film.

Elaborate dress and fabulous landscapes were a feature of Spanish historical melodramas of the 1950s. But *Don Juan* goes further in the elaborate staginess of its costume and sets than, for example, Juan de Orduña's *La Leona de Castilla/The Lioness of Castille* (1951), *Locura de amor/Mad with Love* (1945) or even his *Alba de América/Dawn of America* (1951), the latter complete with desert island sequences. Against the theatrical setting of the lavish interior of an Andalusian palace, luxury ship's quarters or masked ball, or exterior scenes of an impromptu street carnival or popular fair, in *Don Juan* we find an emphasis on sumptuous costumes and disguises. These can be seen to implicitly '[acknowledge] the spectator' as part of 'the theatrical display'.[52] The spectator is also implicitly acknowledged in a series of conceits which constitute Don Juan's cavalier seductions of a trail of contentedly ravished women. In a scene close to the beginning of the film, Don Juan, still in Italy, is sprawled on a satin chaise long, his head resting in the lap of an Italian female, his face obscured by shadows. Two whistles are heard, signalling to the lady that the lover whose hair she is stroking so tenderly is not, in fact, her suitor Don Octavio, but an imposter. A closeup of Don Juan's face reveals his eyes, gently mocking, the rest of his face obscured in darkness. In this conceit we know more than the lady, a dramatic irony at the expense of the female character. In this and numerous later scenarios featuring the hoodwinking of women for the purposes of seduction, the spectator is implicitly acknowledged in a metaphorical and theatrical knowing wink to the audience. It is as if the

53 Gina Marchetti, 'Action-adventure as ideology', in Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (eds), *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), pp. 182–97.

54 For a useful summing up of the debate over *suture*, see Susan Hayward, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 371–9.

55 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 246.

spectator were waiting in the wings, or before the frame, playing out the role of Don Juan's side-kick and accomplice in his multiple seductions.

The duelling scenes too, involve a 'tongue-in-cheek knowingness' on the part of the audience, which Gina Marchetti has found in cinematic swashbucklers.[53] The sword-fighting scenes theatrically present themselves as a playful cinematic romp. The shot/reverse/shot of the sword-fight recalls the cinematic model for the conversation. Film theorists of the 1970s focused on the conversation model to account for *suture*, the process by which the spectator is first enunciated and then erased from the visual economy.[54] In the first shot of the conversation, where the spectator appears to be directly addressed by a cinematic interlocutor, the spectator was seen to come close to sensing the edges of the filmic frame, aware of off-screen space, thereby destroying cinema's illusion. However, a second shot, from the reverse angle, reassuringly sutured the spectator back into invisibility, effectively erasing the spectator from the frame. The sword-fight is like a dramatization of the conversational paradigm, a mobilized version which goes some way to denaturalizing the shot/reverse-shot technique. It is a jaunty revelling in the cinematic possibilities of film. The edges of the film frame are not revealed to the spectator in a troubling way, but the 'diegetic spell'[55] is weakened a little, mobilized by the movement of the camera. The audience becomes aware of the possibilities offered by film to take them on a journey (a mobilized, virtual gaze) purely for entertainment through scenes of representation.

Another scenario provides the spectator with a chance to reflect on the deceptiveness offered by the film's scopic regime. Lady Ontiveros, an English noblewoman with whom Don Juan will maintain an 'open' relationship throughout the film, is bathing in her luxury ship's quarters as an arrogant Don Juan enters and, under the pretence that he is a Spanish royal, attempts to take over the compartment for himself. On his promises that he will keep his back turned, he coaxes Lady Ontiveris to come out of her bathroom in her robe and approach him. The camera, purportedly aligned with her gaze, advances towards him (taking in the full spectacle of his rear-view in tights). But as he turns to face her (reneging on their deal) he finds to his (and our) surprise, that he is facing the black maid, whose wide-eyed comic reaction recalls the stereotypical depiction of domestic servitude in classical prewar Hollywood films (such as *Gone With the Wind*, 1939). With its incongruous hand-held camera technique, the sequence also recalls the early horror genre and

The shot/reverse shot of the sword-fight as cinematic model for the conversation.

56 My thanks to Graeme Hayes for
drawing my attention to this.

57 Doane, in *Femmes Fatales*, finds
deceptive cinema the perfect
medium for her discussion of the
masquerade.

similarly works to 'other' blackness.[56] The spectator is drawn up short
(our shock is cued by the look of terror in the eyes of the maid) in looking
at the male as object of desire. The scene also dramatizes the oscillation
between subject viewing positions as Don Juan is both object and subject
of the gaze. His point of view drives the narrative forward, but he is
simultaneously the prime erotic spectacle. But principally, the scene self-
consciously flaunts cinema's power to deceive. The cinema, like Don
Juan, has the power to dupe: Don Juan as masquerade points to the
deceptiveness hidden within cinema's resources.[57]

In different ways, *Don Juan* reminds us that there is another 'scene'
beyond the diegesis; whether by interlocking with a popular imaginary to
provide a meta-discourse on masculinity or by reminding us of cinema's
power to entertain and to deceive, it creates the distance necessary to
enunciate a spectator before the filmic frame.

Stardom and the female spectator

'A film that is as universal as the figure that inspired it' (*una película
universal, como la figura que la inspiró*) was the tagline on the back cover
of a pamphlet handed out during screenings. The accompanying images
highlight male rivalry and foreground the importance of the sword-fight.
But the front cover showcases the presence of the female consumer, as a
costumed Vilar appears, hand-on-hip, amongst a constellation of female
heads, the heads of actresses from publicity stills, which appear to have
been cut out and stuck on, surrounding Vilar in a montage of female
spectatorship in which we close the circle. The paste-and-stick nature of
the composition, the touched-up colour, makes the image appear like a
pastiche of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, here with Vilar rising on the
horizon as an image of male perfection for female erotic contemplation.
But at the same time, the decoupage-effect recalls the female and
intensely private and domestic pastime of cutting out and collecting
pictures of famous stars (in fact, the copies of *Primer Plano*, a glossy fan
magazine of the 1950s, which I consulted, included sections which had
been cut out as well as pencil notes alongside photographs containing
information about the ages of particular male film stars). The pamphlet
continues cinema's associations with pleasure palaces (the film opened in
the Cine Avenida, whose luxurious vestibule boasted ornamental

ANTONIO VILAR
y
ANNABELLA
· en 1950

DON JUAN

Director: JOSE LUIS SAENZ de HEREDIA

Cover of a publicity pamphlet distributed during screenings. Picture courtesy: Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid.

paintings and stained glass windows by Maumejean). But principally the composition dramatizes the glamour of the star system and its appeal for a mainly female audience. Walter Benjamin, musing on the loss of the uniqueness of a work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, reflects that 'film responds to the shrivelling of the aura with an artificial build up of the 'personality' outside the studio'.[58] In this case, the aura of the movie star is specularized as an arrangement which stresses that Vilar/Don Juan is so charismatic that he 'has all the women'. Moreover, the composition dramatizes a specular regime which the star brings into the frame.

Looking at stars becomes a discreet action, which 'eludes the formalist focus on narrative (principles of thorough motivation, clarity, unity and closure)', by enacting a discourse which derives from beyond the diegesis but which interacts with it to produce a 'string of spectacular moments' within the film, a series of opportunities for looking and gazing in rapt

58 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 731–51, p. 742.

59 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, pp. 246, 249.

attention at stars. [59] Furthermore, a second look at the image reveals further depth. The image is sprinkled with tiny stars from the night sky, which act as a dialectic between two discourses: Don Juan is poised between stardom and the sky. He is standing jauntily at the opening of a path of light which leads upwards towards the Heavens. Now, the composition appears like a religious icon, surrounded in an aureole of brightly shining stars. This visual pun stages a matrix of looking relations, inserting a modern system of looking (cinematic star-gazing) within a history of gazing at religious icons. Or rather, it encodes the religious gaze syncretically, harnessing the glamour of the star system for devotional goals. Religion is glamorized within the metonymic chain of associations generated by the star.

Absorption

A shift in film style, aesthetics and narrativity at the end of *Don Juan* is eased by the development of the theme of a love triangle, which develops into a full-blown tragic love story at the end of the film. The love story theme, like the metonymic signifier of the star, works syncretically to present a lesson in Christian redemption masquerading as a tale of romantic love. Carmen Martín Gaite has recorded how postwar audiences in Spain knew that a Spanish film would either present historical heroics or else the delights of a sacrificed and decent love, a foreclosure of the narrative which removed suspense and significantly reduced the appeal of Spanish films compared to their Hollywood counterparts.[60] Publicity material from *Don Juan* cleverly builds up suspense within the film by presenting two alternative endings, revealing Don Juan to be torn between two women, the English noblewoman Lady Ontiveros and the Spanish maiden Doña Inés.[61] A repertoire of iconography plays out their differences. Lady Ontiveros is a femme fatale, a female form of Don Juan, marked by adultery and treachery.[62] She mocks her husband by making love to Don Juan in full view of the parrot which she keeps in a birdcage, who with its mimicking of her husband's stock phrases comes to represent the absent spouse. Her relationship with Don Juan is based on their mutual promiscuity. She has an affair with an exotic gypsy, symbolized by the red carnation which Don Juan will tread into the ground. But as Lady Ontiveros falls for Don Juan, she is forced to lie to cover her feelings. Thus in a scene, at the Hostería Laurel, as she is bathing, Don Juan calls her 'beautiful, understanding and lacking in tears' (*hermosa, comprensiva y ausente de lágrimas*). He reinforces, 'Tell me again that you don't love me' (*Dime de nuevo que no me amas*) 'I don't love you and I never will' (*no te amo, ni te amaré jamás*) is her reply. At the end of the film her whispered 'my love' (*amor mío*) betrays her true feelings: realizing that Don Juan is in love with her rival, Doña Inés, she betrays him to the guards, who literally stab him in the back. Repeatedly, Lady Ontiveros is associated with an array of empty or mendacious signifiers. She is also doubly

60 Carmen Martín Gaite, *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1987), p. 33.

61 Luis Miguel Fernández has studied the alternating ménage-a-trois created by posters for the film in his book, *Don Juan en el cine español: Hacia una teoría de la recreación fílmica* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2000), p. 106.

62 In Abajo de Pablo, *Mis charlas con José Luis*, Sáenz de Heredia describes Lady Ontiveros as 'a female Don Juan' (*una Doña Juana*), p. 58.

63 '"Guitarras, aceitunas y el talento publicitario de Iturbi y Dalí, faltaron en la fiesta española de Venecia", declara Annabella', *Primer Plano*, 1 October 1950.

marked by her foreignness: a French actress playing an English noblewoman (the foreignness of the French actress, Annabella, was emphasized in publicity for the film. For example, at the Venice Biennale, at which the film was showcased, her French pronunciation (*erre*) was mocked).[63] Double-dealing, adultery, immorality and the active pursuit of sexual pleasure are thus clearly marked as 'foreign', other to the ideals of Spanish femininity.

Doña Inés, meanwhile, is consistently associated with purity, Christianity and Spanishness. She is symbolized by the pearl necklace which she loses (the threat to her maidenhood and honour) and appeals to Don Juan to return, and by the handful of earth which Don Juan tenderly asks her to save for him in a velvet purse and with casual callousness throws away by the roadside.

At the end of the film the slippery signifiers appear to gain depth. The head guard proudly wears a plumed helmet, reminiscent of the parrot's feathers of the earlier scene, suggesting that that the helmet-wearer is a stand-in for the husband and will enact his revenge. The soil from Doña Inés's feet, once discarded, is now found by Don Juan and treasured. It has become the 'dark, ardent Spanish earth',[64] has a religious depth, and taken on sacred status. Where Don Juan's lies formerly drove the narrative forward, now it is Doña Inés's words about divine love which make Don Juan love not just her but also God. Lady Ontiveros now acts as a marker for Don Juan's sincerity. In a scene where she swears to Don Juan that she does not love him, her final 'my love' betrays her, she is still lying, but we remember that it is with her alone that Don Juan has been truthful. Therefore when he confesses to her his love for Doña Inés, he appears sincere for the first time. Don Juan drops his masquerade to reveal a warm heart and shining soul. The story of love as narrative thread eases the generic shift, smoothing over the filmic creases as mendacity turns to sincerity, comedy switches to poignancy and melodrama.

64 Julia Kristeva, 'Don Juan, or loving to be able to', in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 191–208, p. 191

A change of mood, pace and genre towards the end of *Don Juan* marks a shift from the whirling cavalcade of masks, disguises and mistaken identities of the main body of the film towards the expressive mise-en-scene, sombre music and tableaux of grandiose gestures of its finale. This move from theatricality to melodrama involves a similar variation in viewing praxis, from ironic detachment to absorption in the image. Michael Fried, an art historian who takes as his example French painting of the mid 1700s in his book, *Absorption and Theatricality*, has analyzed what he terms a shift in painting's ontological status, in representation itself, in which the problematic relationship between painting and beholding lost its earlier 'theatricality' and began to embrace a new strategy of 'absorption'.[65] Using Diderot's writings on painting and drama as a point of departure, Fried conceives of this historical shift as ushering in a new form of spectatorship: he contrasts two ways of looking. Thus for Diderot, the very condition of spectatordom 'stands indicted as theatrical', in other words it is a medium of 'dislocation and

65 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).

66 Ibid., p. 104.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

estrangement', where the audience's empirical presence is acknowledged in front of the frame.[66] Such a beholding, with its cold awareness of painting's representational effects, prevented the *exemplum virtutis*, or lesson in virtue, an intensity of dramatic effect felt as a major expression of the human spirit which would only be possible with the advent of a form of spectatorship that encouraged 'absorption, sympathy, self-transcendence'.[67] 'Detheatricalize beholding', is Diderot's exhortation. 'Make it once again a mode of access to truth and conviction'; 'Act as if the curtain never rose!' For Diderot, the detheatricalization of spectatorship was possible if the artist could find a way to 'neutralize or negate the beholder's presence, establishing the fiction that no-one is standing before the canvas'.[68] However, paradoxically, this could only be achieved if the beholder could be stopped and held there: for the painting to obliterate the spectator's presence, it must occupy itself with its own, autonomous, represented space. At the same time, it must arrest the viewer's attention, capturing it in its thrall. Fried identifies the actualization of Diderot's call to arms in a series of paintings from mid eighteenth-century France, which depict figures 'wholly absorbed in their actions, passions, activities, feelings, states of mind'. He chooses examples from artists such as Greuze, Chardin and Fragonard to trace a history of absorption: of figures engaged in reading, gazing, praying or otherwise completely absorbed in their own autonomous space. Futhermore, Fried shows how these figures are often arranged in a unified compositional structure, thereby giving the painting as a whole the character of a closed and self-sufficient system.

I submit that at the end of *Don Juan*, we find similar tableaux of states of absorption. In a scene close to the end of the film, Doña Inés is in conference with her priest as she tells him of her decision to enter a convent. We begin with a long single-take closeup of Salgado, who appears absorbed in her own words, her eyes looking out to the top of the frame as if at some distant horizon. A medium-shot of the priest shows that he is gripped, enthralled and excited by her speech. A closeup of Vilar reveals that he has been spying on the conversation; his face is framed and partially obscured by heavy vestry curtains as he peers on the scene. He too appears absorbed as he observes. The repeated cuts between the three characters encircle them within a closed system, but we are not completely excluded from the scene as the reverse-shot of Don Juan creates a space for our gaze even if it is neither reciprocated nor acknowledged. Moreover, Don Juan's mode of looking, whilst recalling the conventions of voyeurism (a medium-shot of Doña Inés and the priest is framed by the curtains, signalling Don Juan's point of view), nevertheless is not a reduplication of a voyeuristic male look, but rather an attempt at a de-eroticization of the gaze. The sexual erotics implicit in the voyeuristic gaze are overlaid with a mode of looking reserved for the contemplation of devotional art. In the iconography of devotional painting, curtains are symbolic of Christian revelation. The masking of Don Juan's face is here connotative of his conversion. Don Juan's
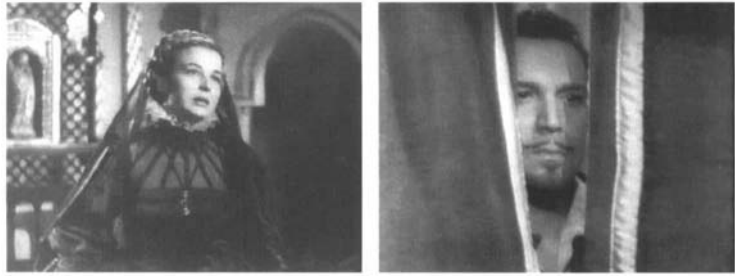
partially obscured view signals his desire not for sexual union but rather to enter into a system to which up until now he has remained an outsider: religious faith.

In the final scenes of the film, Don Juan lies dying as he is carried away on a wooden cart. Using the resources of melodrama, emotions (mourning Don Juan's death) are expressed in the musical dirge, excessive and mannered acting style, as well as the heightened mise-en-scene: flushed sky, rustling trees, swaying cart and rhythmic plodding of the horses which contribute to a rhapsodic montage of chiaroscuro effects. A shot of the cart, travelling towards the distance, uses a slightly canted low angle to appear to point the way to the Heavens. A reaction shot from the face of Mª Rosa Salgado, signals the distress of Doña Inés. But it is from the face of Ciutti (Ramón Giner), in extreme closeup as he joins Don Juan on the cart, tears glistening on his face which appears contorted into an absorbing anguish, that we take our emotional cue.[69] Ciutti's tears signify his sincerity, authenticate his grief and also testify to Don Juan's redemption. The extreme closeup of Ciutti's face encourages an easy empathy which absorbs us in the image. Following Fried, we could say that the spectator is paradoxically at once struck by Ciutti's rapt contemplation and at the same time removed from the scene: there is no place for the empirical subject in the formal logic of this viewing event. This dismissal of the empirical subject could be equated with the logic of cinematic suture, in which the dismissal of the empirical subject necessitates 'the emergence of a different beholder, this time in the order of the real', paradoxically present and yet erased from the scene, saturated and absorbed by the image.[70] Thus the spectator of this film moves from a position of detached, tongue-in-cheek enjoyment, addressed in an ironic aside, to a passive position before the image. In that final sequence, then, we are sutured between Don Juan and Ciutti in a final, absorbing grief. Thus plot and cinematic resources unite to respond to Don Juan's earlier duplicity and emptiness with a final 'imaginary plenitude'.[71] Absorption and suture (with its structure of enunciation and cancelling of the subject) therefore form part of the Fascist aesthetic created by Sáenz de Heredia's film. In its invocation of a passive, absorbed spectatorship, at once present and erased from the scene, *Don Juan* finally clears the way for the interpellation of a subject firmly entrenched within a National–Catholic ideology.

69 Ciutti is pivotal in Don Juan's redemption: in an impassioned speech during the kidnapping of Doña Inés he reveals that for the first time, he believes Don Juan to have gone too far. The move of the ideal spectator therefore mirrors the position of Ciutti: from ironic observation of serial seductions, to outrage at Don Juan's kidnap of Doña Inés, and finally, to grief at his death.

70 A point made by Joan Copjec in 'More! From melodrama to magnitude', in Janet Bergstrom (ed.), *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 249–72, p. 251.

71 See Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Cinema and suture', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1977–8), pp. 35–47.

Ciutti's tears provide an emotional cue.

Subversive pleasures: glamour and eroticism

Whilst there is not space to do justice to the topic here, a quick review of historical melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s in Spain reveals that the use of absorptive poses is widespread. For example, in *Alba de América*, (Juan de Orduña, 1951) the figure of Columbus, again played by Antonio Vilar, at the end of the film stares out melancholically to the night sky, his figure silhouetted, petrified to mimic the familiar Columbus monument in Barcelona.[72] But repeatedly, whatever their theme, these historical extravaganzas overlay images and motifs with Catholic iconography (a bank of tears, heavens and crosses), with the effect that, most often, these absorptive poses are associated with Catholic iconography. Thus, for example, the repeated framing of heroines as Spanish Madonnas (Juanita Reina as the mantilla-wearing singer Lola in *La Lola de va a los puertos/ Lola Goes Back to the Sea* [Juan de Orduña, 1947]; Amparo Rivelles, as the Catholic Queen Isabella in *Alba de América*; Aurora Batista as the heroine in *Agustina de Aragón*, whose gaze is once again raised to the heavens at the end of that film).[73] The effect is a gallery of absorptive poses, a reification of Catholic imagery crystallized or petrified into position, creating a Catholic spectatorship, a Fascist aesthetic which repeatedly sutures the spectator into a passive absorption before the image.[74]

Yet *Don Juan* is unusual, perhaps, in that its shift in genre and its theme of multiple seductions presents tensions which offer certain opportunities for spectators to resist an 'ideal spectatorship'. Above all, perhaps, it is the film's metonymy, the way it attempts to overwrite the secular with the religious, which allows for multiple interpretations. Examples of the film's metonymy continue right to the end of the film as Don Juan says he has a 'date in heaven', referring at once to Doña Inés and to God. Repeatedly, the film harnesses eroticism or glamour for Catholic aims, but one senses that a spectator could just as easily yield to its secular charms – with its play of signifiers, the film can be seen to 'secularize the absorptive tradition' in certain instances, rather than the reverse.[75] In the first place, for example, the film's attempts towards the end of the diegesis to de-eroticize the gaze (a structurally difficult enterprise according to the classical paradigm of pleasure in looking) do nothing to disavow the erotic pleasure of a series of scenes from the film

72 Designed by Rafael Atché and built for the Universal Exhibition of 1888.

73 For an excellent study of the roles of Spanish heroines, see Jo Labanyi, 'Feminizing the nation: women, subordination and subversion in post-civil war Spain', in Ulrike Sieglohr (ed.), *Heroines without Heroes: Reconstructing Female Identities in European Cinema, 1945–51* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 163–84.

74 See Alejandro Yarza's excellent article, which analyzes the use of Catholic imagery in Sáenz de Heredia's *Raza* and advances the theory of a brand of Fascist aesthetic kitsch (which relies on petrification for its impact). For Yarza, camp was a strategy adopted in the post-Franco years as a way to offer a revision of this kitsch aesthetic. See his 'The petrified tears of General Franco: kitsch and Fascism in José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *Raza*', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2004), pp. 41–55. My thanks to Alejandro Yarza for allowing me a copy of the article prior to its publication.

75 Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, p. 45.

which offer up the male body (that of Don Juan) for the voyeuristic contemplation of the audience composed of both male and female spectators.

At the same time, the opportunities offered by cinema for multiple scenarios of identification mean that star performance can undermine the deliberations of plot. Thus, whilst the narrative of love and betrayal encourages an identification with Doña Inés, symbol of home-grown sexual purity, against the infidelities and betrayals of foreigner Lady Ontiveros, nevertheless, Rosa Salgado's acting style was described as 'insipid' by one critic of the film, whilst French actress Annabella was more fashionably dressed in 1950s hair scarf and revealing *décolleté*: the triumph of style over substance. Carmen Martín Gaite has described the subversive images offered by a handful of film actresses ('isolated breaches' [*brechas aisladas*]) which worked in opposition to the stifling recommendations for hairstyles issued by the Sección Femenina, the female section of the Falange.[76] Lady Ontiveros is not only more stylish and lively than the rather stiff Doña Inés, but she also picks up men and discards them at her will: to the gypsy lover who serenades her at dusk she remarks: 'so you are clever too. I thought you were just a pretty face' (*de modo que eres espabilado. Creí que no eras más que guapo*). Lady Ontiveros offers far more interesting possibilities for a female fantasy than her insipid female counterpart Doña Inés.

Finally, at the end of the film we are left with the feeling that Don Juan's Christian rebirth has been tacked on, a hasty Catholic redemption after almost two hours of sexual shenanigans. The final scenes are dependent on the figure of Ciutti for the whole weight of their emotional appeal, whilst Don Juan's rather wordy speech and climactic punchline 'Don Juan, Spaniard' (*Don Juan, español*) retain touches of a theatrical inauthenticity which border on camp. Possibly the film's function is that of a carnivalesque revelling in disguise and sexual misdemeanours in the realm of fantasy, a liminal trying on of illicit subject positions before the audience returns to a life of piety outside the pleasure palace. But if the expressive mise-en-scene of the final scenes stands for what cannot be expressed, then clearly what is missing from this scene is an articulation of Don Juan's *jouissance* – a sexual energy repressed.[77] Throughout the film Don Juan's sexual exploits have been referred to or insinuated, but they always take place outside of the filmic frame. Expelled from the order of the symbolic, *jouissance* occupies the order of the real. Thus Don Juan's words to Ciutti, 'when you hear my spurs galloping against the sky' (*cuando sientas en el cielo el ruido de espuelas*) recalls hallucinatory *jouissance*, which lingers, unspoken, in the desires and fantasies of the audience, long after the lights have gone up.

76 Carmen Marín Gaite, *The Back Room*, trans. Helen Lane (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 2000), p. 61.

77 For Lacanian *jouissance*, see Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: an Introduction* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 185–93.

Representing rural migrants in the city: experimentalism in Wang Xiaoshuai's *So Close to Paradise* and *Beijing Bicycle*

JIAN XU

The emergence in the 1990s of a number of independent, experimental filmmakers was a significant event in China's filmmaking history. For over a decade they forged a critical cinema that defied the mainstream film industry. With a small budget, a microscopic lens trained on everyday urban life, and a disdain for the historical epic or national allegory that so engaged their older, more illustrious colleagues, these young, 'sixth-generation' directors, as they are often called, developed their own forms and styles of filmmaking to attend to the specific contemporary issues brought about by the country's rapid modernization – issues such as new social inequities and new forms of subaltern suffering in Chinese society. Although the cultural impact of their films is only just beginning to be felt inside China, their works have garnered considerable critical attention abroad. The recent official recognition of a group of these independent directors, symbolized by an invitation to attend the Shanghai International Film Festival at which contracts with state-owned studios are signed, evidences their gradual inroads into the domestic market.[1] Their underground works are now being reviewed for public release and their future films are much less likely to be banned, but will their 'going mainstream' lead to the end in China of critical cinema, with its edgy style and subversive content? While this may be a justifiable apprehension, there are reasons for optimism. Just as with the 'fifth-generation' directors, their participation in mainstream filmmaking

2 Dorothy J. Solinger provides the following statistical information: 'According to a major government study of seven of China's biggest municipalities, the largest group of them (about 30%) earn their living on construction projects, often bound to specific projects or else to annual contracts; another 22% peddle in produce markets, not uncommonly remaining for years on end; some 18.5% engage in "household service", many of whom are nursemaids for periods as little as three months; and about 6% work in the repair trade. ... A catch-all category of "other types of hired labor", amounting to 21.7%, includes those in state factories (of whom the majority work in textiles) on three- to five-year contracts, lay laborers hauling freight, sanitation workers, coal deliverers, and garbage collectors. Other occupations that attract floaters include barbering and tailoring, street performing, fluffing cotton quilts, popping popcorns, bricklaying, restaurant work, and handicrafts and furniture manufacture.' Dorothy J. Solinger, 'The floating population in the cities: chances for assimilation?', in Deborah S. Davis et al. (eds), *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: the Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 114–15.

3 For book-length accounts of the subject, see Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Li Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China's Floating Population* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Solinger's study is based on numerous interviews she had with city officials, scholars, and migrants in six major Chinese cities between 1990 and 1994 plus extensive documentary research, whereas Li Zhang's study focuses on the specific experience of a large migrant community in Beijing, including

may well affect the sensibility of the whole industry and make it more open to difference in matters of form and subject matter. In retrospect, certainly, this independent cinema did contribute significantly to what remains of a critical position in contemporary Chinese film culture. Whatever historical vision or philosophical depth their works may lack in comparison with the works of the previous generations of directors, the best among the sixth generation do intervene in the formidable processes of integration between the sociopolitical structure of a once socialist nation-state and the commodifying forces of global capitalism. This essay, in the hope of addressing the dearth of critical scholarship on these directors, offers a study of two films by Wang Xiaoshui that focus on the condition of the rural-to-urban migrants in the Chinese city.

Among the wide spectrum of social issues that find their way into Chinese cinema is that of the newly emergent subaltern class in the city, following the increased social mobility brought about by market forces. This new subaltern class consists of millions of migrant workers from the countryside, the majority of whom are peasants coming to the city to sell their labour. Confronted with the impenetrability of the metropolis, they remain unassimilated. Nomads of subjectivity, they linger in a liminal space in which they belong neither to the country nor to the city. This new 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) provides the metropolis with cheap labour for jobs shunned by the urbanites.[2] The state, however, has an ambivalent attitude towards this new subaltern class. On the one hand, it recognizes the migrants' substantial contributions to national economy; on the other, it sees the mobile people as a potential problem for social stability on account of the difficulties involved in regulating and transforming them into a new kind of subject. The urbanites tend to see the migrants either as outsiders who put stress on urban infrastructure and resources or as the cause of the rising levels of crime in the city. Thus the migrant workers receive little sympathy for their hardships, and public concern about social security displaces the issues of their exploitation and subordination.[3]

Media representations of rural migrants, treating them as a social problem rather than a new social force to be tapped, have also contributed to their negative image. Migrant workers appear in many feature films living and working in harsh conditions in which they seem either pitiful or suspicious; not many films explore the issues of their displacement and subordination. For this reason, Wang Xiaoshuai's *So Close to Paradise* (1995) and *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) deserve special attention. With an exclusive focus on rural-to-urban migrants, these two films examine the difficulties of making a living in an environment in which there is little support and trust, and the possibility of these workers forming new social ties and eventually assimilating into the city. As a critical intervention into the symbolic order of 'market socialism' (or, officially, 'socialism with a market economy'), these films represent the rural migrants not as a homogenous group but as a heterogeneous people with different ambitions, work ethics, urban experiences and modes of

social belonging. Thus the films challenge the regime of mainstream representation that seeks both to marginalize and to normalize the migrant people.

However, the critical valence of these films consists not only in their politics of social marginality but also in their open-ended exploration of the interior experience of the new subaltern class in the wake of dismantling the socialist belief system. The rural-to-urban migrants are an embodiment of the historical juncture at which the vision of a socialist utopia and the value of national authenticity invested in the rural space are replaced by the primacy of individual desire and rights and the logic of global modernity invested in the metropolis. The migrants are not just travelers in geographical space – the cultural-ideological distance they need to traverse is greater. The films examine how the uneven development of the 'socialist market economy' creates 'modern individuals' out of suffering migrants, and in what way their uprooted status and their 'threshold experience' in the city make them freer of, and more susceptible to, ideologies. Their uncoordinated, heterogeneous condition of existence does not lead to a unified class consciousness; their bodies are nevertheless ready to put their labour power as commodity into the circulation of variable capital on the world stage. Although the myth of individualism seems always to accompany the circulation of capital and labour, for embodied migrants running away from rural impoverishment (actual people instead of demographic abstracts), the experience of abandoning socialist idealism to accede to an ideology not inculcated by a political system but naturalized by consumerism is a painful process of subject formation.

As the countryside was, up to the mid 1980s, consistently idealized as the site of the authentic Chinese nation, it is no surprise that socialist ideologies were heavily invested in a rural culture embodied by a historically produced set of concrete dispositions and behaviours. In postsocialist Chinese cinema, this rural culture is nostalgically preserved in the image of a stubborn and unyielding peasant who perseveres against all the odds in his/her effort to accomplish what s/he thinks right and just: in Zhang Yimou's films alone, for example, we have Qiuju in *Quiju da guan si/The Story of Qiuju* (1992), Zhaodi in *Wo de fu qin mu qin/The Road Home* (1999), and the child teacher in *Yi ge dou bu neng shao/Not One Less* (1999). Although these images were created at a time when the socialist movements were being discredited, they function as reminders that the rural culture on which the socialist revolution depended still existed, and that there was perhaps still a way back to the rural utopia it represented.[4] Although this rural culture is also reconstructed in the main characters of both Wang's films, it no longer suggests the possibility of an ideological redemption; rather, it functions as the pre-condition (or raw material) out of which historically contingent migrant subjectivities emerge.

Wang's films, like many other sixth-generation works, invite discussions on realism because they obviously posit a concrete

4 The socialist investment in the rural I discuss here is only at the level of ideology. In actual treatment of the peasantry, I agree with Solinger in *Contesting Citizenship* that the PRC government has always denied it the full and equal citizenship that it has accorded the urban population.

sociohistorical referent: they tackle specific issues of contemporary urban expansion and the corollary withering of a rural economy and way of life. This social realism, with its customary assertion of fidelity to the referent, can be problematized. The ethical viability of representing the subaltern with simulated images produced by mass-media technologies can also be questioned. However, in the case of Wang's two films, the claim to referential truth, I would argue, is not essentialist, for they do not posit a unified experience of rural migration. More importantly, their representations of the rural migrants do not seek narrative closure. Unlike Zhang Yimou's redemptive aesthetics, Wang's film realism neither assigns to the rural migrants the subject position of a unique (yet typical) individual capable of going all the way to fulfill his/her desire, nor treats them simply as the subject of oppression and exploitation, and thus passive victims of 'market socialism'. Wang's films explore the complicated process of ideological interpellation and misrecognition, complicated because the rural migrants in his films neither simply resist nor totally accept the ideologies of individualism and global capitalism. With their recalcitrant self-image, they clearly see themselves as the 'other' of the commercialized urban space, yet in a way they are always already subjects of its ideological universe.

   This open-ended exploration of migrant subjectivity contingent on the historical condition of contemporary China avoids the trap that could easily befall liberal-minded intellectuals representing the subaltern. The liberal humanist endeavour to end sweatshop conditions, for instance, can itself become oppressive when it advocates the return of migrants to the country so that they can be 'liberated' from capitalist exploitation. Wang's films give the sense that migrants can handle bad working conditions, low pay and lousy benefits as long as there is hope that eventually they will 'make it' in the city. A more devastating condition of their life in the city, Wang's films seem to suggest, results from the incompatibility of their rural culture with the commodified urban world. This problem of incompatible culture encompasses migrants' lack of the skills and technological know-how needed for individual advancement in the city as well as the sheer absence of communal support, the reason for their perpetual exile even when they are physically settled.

   What is most interesting about these films, however, is that their experiments with representing the migrant workers' subjectivity seem ultimately to exceed Wang's own cinematic imagination: what finally comes across on the screen goes beyond the limits of subjective intentionality. This ostensible failure to fasten the signifieds opens up an alterity that defies simulation and enables the films all the better to bring to the public consciousness the unspeakable condition of the emergent underclass. There is actually nothing paradoxical in this outcome: by not reducing alterity to the function of the same, but letting the trace of the subaltern other behind the images be felt, the films clear a path towards the singularity of the migrants' suffering. In this sense, Wang's cinematic representation of the migrants can be considered ethical. In trying to

invoke and receive, not domesticate or normalize, the otherness of the migrants' subjectivity, these films resist the fetishizing power of images and allow heterogeneous meanings and possibilities to arise. However, the experimental feature of this kind of film realism, which uses simulated images to debunk its own claim to referential presence, can easily be overlooked. It comes as no surprise that the films' 'effect of the real', which in my view is as much performatively summoned by the spectators in reception as actively contrived in production, should conceal the films' innovative quality. I wish to articulate the films' experimental quality by examining their narrative form and style, which I believe to function rather differently from those employed in classic film realism. I will show how the two films cannibalize such genre styles as gangster-film noir and documentary realism not only to create an aesthetic of immediacy, but more importantly to call into question the simulative nature of their images. This double coding is perhaps the secret of many sixth-generation directors. It is what enables them, working within the media world of simulacrum, not to become mere copyists.

So Close to Paradise is set in late 1980s in Wuhan, a big city on the Yangtze River in south-east China. It tells the story of two young migrants, Gao Ping and Dongzi, who are friends from the same village. Dongzi is still in his late teens while Gao Ping is over twenty, and thus the caretaker in the relationship, inefficient as he is in that role. Dongzi is the narrator, whose voiceover gives coherence to the narrative by filling in missing action, threading together events separated by the film's elliptical editing. What happens on screen is thus presented as Dongzi's retrospective account. Gao Ping, however, is the one who makes things happen. Dongzi's reminiscence dwells chiefly on how Gao Ping's criminal dealings gradually lead him along a destructive path, and how the unfolding action brings Dongzi closer to Ruan Hong, whom everybody calls the 'Vietnamese girl' and who, because of her relationship with a gang leader, in part contributes to Gao Ping's murder.

    So Close to Paradise has many features of the gangster film. The opening shots of a crime scene are bathed in a gloomy blue light, as Gao Ping's double-crossing scheme to appropriate a large sum of money has backfired. The story continues with Gao Ping's effort to find the man who betrayed his own betrayal. His attempt to regain the money that was not his to start with brings us in touch with an underworld of gangsters, prostitutes, seamy nightclubs and underground factories in a gritty urban setting. Dongzi's reflective voiceover narration, the low-key, expressionistic lighting and colour, the murky rooms, shadowy streets, seedy alleys and shabby buildings on the river, Ruan Hong's initial appearance as a mysterious, seductive *femme fatale* and Gao Ping's hardboiled character are a classic set of film noir signs.

    Does Wang's use of such a film-noir lexicon in representing young rural migrants indicate that he is more interested in a film style than the issue of the 'floating population'? Is he using the migrants as mere

demographic material with which to try his hand at a rather conventional
film aesthetic? Or does he believe that this violent world of gangsters and
crime really is the destination of rural-to-urban migration, so that his
filmic representation is part and parcel of a stigmatizing public
discourse?[5]

In answering these questions we need to consider how the 'noir world'
on screen is seen through Dongzi's memory, which gives it a subjective,
emotional colouring. Dongzi, the subject of this memory, comes across
as a hardworking, law-abiding country youth who is critical of Gao
Ping's illegal activities even as he helps him kidnap Ruan Hong (who
turns out to be a rural migrant too). Dongzi represents a great number of
migrant youths who stubbornly adhere to rural values and ethics, despite
this putting them at a disadvantage in the urban world. We see them in
the film working as 'shoulder poles' for boat passengers, carrying
miscellaneous baggage in the hustle and bustle of the streets around the
wharf. When Dongzi is working, we often see open space and sunlight,
with the river and the boats clearly outlined under the blue sky. The part
of the film that is noir can thus be thought of as a kind of 'mindscreen',
Dongzi's subjective impression of the mysterious, alluring, yet
frightening world of the metropolis. Through this subjective encoding,
the film presents a diegetic world that is anti-communitarian, a world in
which the only way for a migrant to overcome desolate loneliness is to
join the gangs. It is a world in which a migrant who plays by the rules is
guaranteed failure, a world that goes against everything a rural migrant
like Dongzi is brought up to believe in. On the other hand, it is a world
that holds out hope of a better life unimaginable in the country, an
alluring world in which one can get rich fast, and in which one meets
mysterious women like Ruan Hong.

The film-noir style thus borrows from the gangster-noir genre a
vocabulary arranged by a structuring process internal to the film text and
filtered through the eyes of Dongzi, the site of enunciation within the
diegesis. Because of this arrangement, the resulting subjective angle of

Rural migrant youths
working as 'shoulder poles' in
the city. *So Close to Paradise*
(Wang Xiaoshuai, 1995).

6   For the interpenetrating
    relationship between the
    semantic and the syntactic in
    constituting film genres, see Rick
    Altman, 'A semantic/syntactic
    approach to film genre', in Leo
    Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds),
    Film Theory and Criticism:
    Introductory Readings (New York,
    NY and Oxford: Oxford University
    Press, 1999), pp. 630–41.

the shots tends to turn the spectator into a diegetic observer. This arrangement is part of an experimental syntax that enables Wang to appropriate the gangster-film semantics so as to generate, with the collaboration of the spectator, a new textual meaning.[6] This syntax keeps intact the signification of a gangster film in which the underworld is the symptom of social ills, but it designates no intrinsic connection between this underworld and rural migrants. For example, because the spectator is experiencing the film world from Dongzi's point of view, the sequence of shots that shows how he is urged by Gao Ping to descend the stairs of the underground Lilikaraok Nightclub, and his obstinate resistance, is symbolic both of the temptations of the city and of a rural migrant's innate aversion to these temptations. The enticement to moral degeneration, the film seems to indicate, is one characteristic of contemporary urban space that many young migrants experience. Some, like Dongzi, are not susceptible to its corruption; others, like Ruan Hong, pass through it like a purgatory. But a few, such as Gao Ping, who treat life as a gamble, are swallowed up in it. From dangerous gangsters to innocent migrants, the 'floating population' is shown to be composed of people of diverse backgrounds, desires and moral character. Since the spectator is positioned to have access only to Dongzi's subjective experience, the film affords rural migrants no single underlying consciousness.

However, the film does posit Dongzi as typical of many rural youths who migrate to the city. It affirms his honesty and industry, and attributes his hardships to problems with the country's social and economic structures. His innocence is protected from moral contamination and his country ways evoke a sympathetic response from the landlady, who finally helps him by employing him to look after the goods she stores in his apartment. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the rural qualities that Dongzi embodies, once celebrated as a national characteristic, are now precisely what makes him unfit for the world of market economy. The film portrays Dongzi as someone who has travelled the physical distance between country and city without negotiating their ideological distances. On the other hand, the film ensures that Dongzi does not really have a way to adapt to the urban environment because of his lack of necessary skills and credentials. The only quick route to prosperity that is attractive to young rural migrants is therefore via the gangs. Narratively, this could be what gives the film its formal potential of creating a noir ambience. Gao Ping's ruin indicates that the gangs are not a solution, so the critical positioning of the film therefore rests on depicting how the morally desirable qualities of rural simplicity and unyielding stubbornness are doomed in the postsocialist city.

Although Gao Ping's criminal activities make up most of the story's key events, the film's overall emotive content does not depend on them. Equally important is the subtle drama of the triangular relationship between the three protagonists, which begins when Dongzi helps Gao Ping to kidnap Ruan Hong. The unfolding of this romance follows the

film's exploratory syntax to probe an economy of desire that is regulated by the necessity of a daily struggle for survival, and opens the film's narrative to a mode of subjectivity that can only be considered as particular to the migrant situation. Although the semantics of romance, like its noir-gangster counterpart, is ultimately not fulfilled at the story level, it is part of the crucial material that makes up the diegetic world.

In order to obtain information about the man who tricked him, Gao Ping, with Dongzi's help, kidnaps Ruan Hong. The highly noir scene in which the men stalk Ruan Hong in the dark streets prepares us to read the film events in a certain way. Thus, when we cut to Gao Ping's bedroom to find Ruan Hong already captured, we are not particularly shocked to see that Gao Ping, to subdue Ruan Hong's furious resistance, forces himself on her while her hands are still bound and her mouth muffled. But what appears to be rape astonishingly transforms Ruan Hong into Gao Ping's lover. The film does not show how this happened, because Dongzi, who peered at the scene from the other side of the door, reports nothing. But when the next cut brings us images of Gao Ping and Ruan Hong enjoying each other's company in public, we notice that even Dongzi seems a little surprised. As their relationship develops, Dongzi becomes resistant to Gao Ping's authority. This seems in part to reflect a feeling of betrayal on Dongzi's part, his increased loneliness as Gao Ping now spends most of his time with Ruan Hong. But the film also makes us realize that Dongzi is becoming attracted to Ruan Hong. His rebellion is an assertion of manhood, and although Ruan Hong does not seem to think of Dongzi as the type of man she should consort with, she cares for him when he is hurt. But why does Ruan Hong submit to violence and turn her animosity towards Gao Ping into a love affair? Is she 'bad' (in the sense of being a *femme fatale*) or so confused as to mistake rape for love? Is she so utterly lonely and desperate for an intimate relationship that she can no longer choose a partner? The film offers no explanation for this development, no judgement of the characters' behaviour, thus leaving the episode open to a diversity of conjectures.

Ruan Hong's acquiescence to her situation remains unexplained. *So Close to Paradise* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 1995).

When Gao Ping discovers that Ruan Hong is actually the girlfriend of the gang leader, he breaks up with her for fear of unnecessary trouble. Dongzi follows Ruan Hong into a restaurant trying to console her. Although there is not much in the dialogue that is romantic, and Dongzi's reminiscing voiceover reveals only his admiration for her beauty, the composition of the painterly scene is not without a touch of melodrama: the warmth of candlelight on the table, the big moon outside the window, and the rich-textured shallow focus on the two facing each other, create a sense of intimacy and romance. But their meeting is virtually silent, and Dongzi, gentle as always, is unable to break through Ruan Hong's nonchalance. The silence somehow jars with the setting. What is there that prevents them communicating? Are Dongzi's country-boy qualities the barrier to him reaching Ruan Hong, who is determined to run away from her own rural past?

In a delicate manner, the film narrates Dongzi's feelings for Ruan Hong, and shows how these feelings do eventually draw Ruan Hong close to him. For instance, when told that all the men who said they would record her songs only wanted to sleep with her, Dongzi buys a pocket tape recorder and goes to the nightclub to record her performance without her knowledge. Although Gao Ping and Ruan Hong later make up, their relationship is doomed: the former is killed and the latter arrested, and Dongzi is left alone in the world until the day Ruan Hong is released from prison. When she comes to bid farewell in the last scenes of the film, there are unambiguous signs that she now reciprocates Dongzi's feelings. But neither character seems to expect their relationship to develop. The film ends with much pathos: the sombre story of three migrant youths has led nowhere. While this might be typical of film noir, in view of the film's melodramatic potential it could be felt as another 'letting down' of audience expectation.

The film thus relinquishes its discursive desire to analyze (or moralize) the young migrants' relationship with one another and their problematic behaviour in their struggle for survival. Instead, it lets Dongzi's voiceover, the images of the nightmarish underworld, and the cliches of romantic sentiment intermix and animate one another. To be sure, the urban space evoked here is not natural. But, at the same time, the formal failure of the gangster-romantic story draws attention to its own falseness. It thus has an analytical potential as a demystified version of the simulated diegetic world. When our expectations of genre conventions are not met, we pay more attention to the social, anthropological character of the scenes, which are very often shot on location, occasionally laced with news photos and radio broadcasting, revealing the official takes on the rural-to-urban migration. We notice that the urban space, freed from genre stereotypes, is inscribed with social boundaries that turn the geographic layout of the city into marginalizing limits. These limits are felt through the everyday attitude and practice of the people in the city. The waitress in the nightclub, for instance, is not responsive to Gao Ping's call. A shop girl exhibits a look

of alarm at Dongzi's chance proximity on the street. The social fabric of the film space thickens, calling into question the fiction of the film's narrative form and style.

At the end of the film, although he has previously thought seriously about returning to the village (and has been advised to do so by Gao Ping, shortly before his murder), Dongzi decides to stay in the city. When Ruan Hong visits, she finds him wearing Gao Ping's suit and smoking a filtered cigarette just like Gao Ping. Does this suggest that, his stubborn rusticity notwithstanding, even he is changing? Does it indicate that rural values and beliefs, however deep their roots in tradition, will be eroded as rural migrants continue to live in the city? If this is so, then Dongzi is, after all, no exception to the processes of 'individuation'. His fate is thus sealed, to drift rootless as others do in the uneven development of a 'socialist market economy'.

While *So Close to Paradise* explores the initial processes of 'individuation' in which migration forces the subject of the Maoist state out of its utopian cocoon and collective rural values, it does not examine what kind of postsocialist individual may eventually emerge. The film is not about the formation of new postsocialist subjects, nor does its impressionistic representation of alienation, despite its salient theme of social displacement and marginality, stage a direct encounter between urbanites and migrants. Although the film treats migrant experience through the emotional life of three young migrants, it does not tackle the issue of social difference specifically. This is the focus of Wang's next film on the subject, *Beijing Bicycle*. This film brings together two teenagers, one fresh from the country, the other a Beijing resident, in a dramatic conflict over the ownership of a bike. The direct encounter between the two youths sets up a contrast of values and enables a more concrete representation of the lived experience of rural migrants. Interestingly, the film's attempt at documentary objectivity does not narrow the scope of its representation; on the contrary, it inflects its visual representation with a symbolic dimension, so much so that the film's critical potential expands. As a result, the migrant youths' external subjection, their social experience of dislocation and alienation, are linked with an ideological interpellation achieved in part through the subject's own (mis)recognition of what could be called an imaginary reality of the Other. Thus it explores the operations of 'socialism with a market economy' in conjunction with the processes of the migrant workers' subject formation. Both these operations and processes are material and ideological.

Beijing Bicycle thus starts with a strong feel of documentary realism. A group of rural youths are interviewed for jobs by Fei Da Express Delivery, a new company that specializes in inner-city mail delivery. The interview appears unrehearsed and all the boys have rustic looks that are not the result of makeup: their mannerisms and accents immediately place them outside Beijing. With the same documentary directness, the boys are shown in the next scene lined up and uniformed, receiving

instructions from the company manager. The manager declares that the company has cleaned them up and equipped them with high-quality mountain bikes in order to make them fit to represent the company and to take their place in urban society. He concludes his speech with these words, 'From today on, you're the Camel Xiangzi of our new era. Do your best!'

'The Camel Xiangzi of our new era' reminds the audience that these rural youths are going through a similar rural-to-urban migration/settlement experienced some seventy years ago by the protagonist of Lao She's well-known novel, *Camel Xiangzi*.[7] It thereby foreshadows the troubled drama between Guo Liangui, our protagonist, and his bike.[8] Of course, the qualification 'of our new era' indicates that Guo will not retrace exactly Xiangzi's ruinous path of a failed struggle to own his rickshaw. In fact, in addition to the fifty percent that will always go to the company, the company will deduct another thirty percent of everybody's monthly earnings until the employees have paid for the bikes. The reference nonetheless implies, humorously as it may be construed, that Guo's employment as a mail deliverer in contemporary Beijing, in the nature of its contract and benefits, may not be too different from Xiangzi's seventy years ago.

Beijing welcomes Guo with all its exciting unfamiliarity and lurking dangers. At first Guo manages to navigate its maze of back alleys, revolving doors, and hotel corridors, but with just one day to go before he can completely own the bike, he is tempted into the shower rooms of a modern bathing house. When he finally extricates himself from its luxurious interior he finds that his bike has been stolen. While Guo is busy searching for his lost bike in order to continue his job, frequent cross-cutting brings us the parallel development of what at first appears to be a separate storyline. This is when Jian, the city boy who buys Guo's lost bike from the black market, becomes Guo's opposite number and comes to occupy half of the narrative space. This cross-cutting of parallel developments allows a clear contrast between the two boys, between their respective ways of life, desires, values and subjectivities.

It is too neat to say that the boys' struggle over the bike represents a conflict between use value and exchange value, but the respective uses the bike has for the two boys do suggest one important difference. The bike is vitally important to Guo because it promises him a livelihood in Beijing. It is a practical instrument by which he can get his daily job done. Equivalent to a farming tool that extends a peasant's working body and connects him to the earth, the bike expands the radius of Guo's movement in urban space and includes him in the millions of bikers on Beijing's teeming streets. If the bike has use value for Jian too, the uses are nevertheless very different. It is no longer a tool of labour, and Jian's livelihood does not depend on it. Although he rides it to school, transportation is not its main function. More importantly, as we soon find out, Jian's bike identifies him with the circle of schoolmates who all own bikes and perform various stunts on them to impress each other. After

7 'Camel Xiangzi' is regrettably mistranslated by the English subtitle, which renders it as 'carrier pigeon.'

8 Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi* depicts the struggle of a rural youth named Xiangzi who wants to make a living in Beijing by working as a rickshaw puller. The story centres on his dogged efforts and eventual failure to own a rickshaw, and how in the end unbearable hardships bring about his physical and moral degeneration. See Lao She, *Rickshaw*, trans. Jean M. James (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979).

getting the bike, Jian feels on top of the world riding along with his girlfriend, and her praise for its quality makes him proud. Tracking shots are used to show Jian riding along the streets with both hands off the handlebars; the sheer joy the bike gives him in every way equals Guo's. But Jian loves the bike for different reasons: it wins him peer respect and the admiration of his girlfriend, symbolically marking him as 'cool'.

The weight of the film's critical import begins to register when the two boys meet and the same bike puts them through different crises. With his job at stake, Guo wanders the city searching for the bike and gets arrested on suspicion of being a bicycle thief. When he finally finds his bike and tries to take it back, he draws the whole pack of Jian's schoolmates upon him. He is beaten and the bike forcibly taken away. Out of sheer stubbornness, he seeks the help of Jian's father. It turns out that Jian, to buy the bike, has stolen the family's money. Being poor, Jian's father had broken his promise to buy Jian a bike if he got good grades in school. The fact that both boys are from poor families makes the difference of their circumstances all the more keen. Of roughly the same age, Jian is pushed to do well in school so that he will compete for a good university education. A good student with good prospects, his day-to-day concerns and worries appear trivial when compared to Guo's existential struggle. What factors have made the two boys' conditions of existence so drastically different? While Mao's effort to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas was a bane to the national economy, has the urban expansion based on capitalist models of management and market economy been a boon to the whole population?

Beijing Bicycle invites such questions, though it provides no definitive answer. Its objective perspective and microscopic focus doggedly follows the unfolding drama around the bike, detailing how the two boys finally agree to a compromise – each will use the bike every other day – and how this peculiar arrangement, besides bringing real difficulties to Guo, wounds Jian's pride and eventually alienates him from his girlfriend and their circle. The story is then pushed to its unexpected, albeit logical, climax. Unable to swallow his humiliation when a schoolmate wins the girlfriend with his superior bicycle stunts, Jian violates the codes of the circle by hitting him with a brick on the head. Knowing that he has now become a complete outsider, he has no more use for the bike. But just as he tells Guo to take full possession of the bike, a violent mob made up of his former friends descends upon them. Senseless violence ensues, in which both the boys and the bike are the victims. For Guo, this undeserved experience of violence could be seen as a rite of passage for his initiation into the metropolis, for we see this usually passive, tractable country boy struggle to his feet, pick up a brick, smash it on the head of the city boy who, unable to leave the excitement of wrecking the bike, has lingered at the scene. Taking our cue from the manager's comparison of Guo to Camel Xiangzi, this initiation into violence can be read as a moral decline, which characterizes Xiangzi's retrogression. But the end of the film has another twist. After knocking

down the frenzied city boy, Guo picks up the wrecked bike; with difficulty, he hoists it onto his shoulder and walks off, to the amazement of Jian, now sitting up on the ground, wounded. As Guo goes onto the wide streets, slow motion is used to capture his obstinate walk, with the wreckage on his shoulder, across the intersections where long lines of traffic are stopped, waiting. The whole city seems poised, temporarily frozen in front of the slow-walking country youth, before it is seized again in a frenzy of motion and activity.

Is this ending meant to celebrate Guo's dogged determination to keep what he believes in so that, symbolically, both wounded youth and wrecked bike represent rural values endangered by urban expansion? With this reading, we may see urban expansion and modernity as the other to some authentic quality of Chineseness embedded in Guo. The momentarily stopped traffic is the film's call for a last reflection on a national character that will soon be no more. Or should we understand the ending instead as a critique of Guo's backward mentality, represented by his very stubbornness and inflexibility so that the poised traffic can be seen as being held up by Guo crossing the street with his heavy load – the so-called authentic national character? In this reading, the film can be seen to criticize the mentality of the rural and the provincial for impeding the development of cosmopolitan China.

That the film makes no clear statement but rather leaves both interpretations open is itself a critical stance that is relatively new in mainland Chinese filmmaking, a stance said to be adopted first in *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984). The ambiguity affords room for thinking so that the impact of the contradictions of social life may register. Perhaps the two boys are not so different after all in what they stand for. That is why they finally come together to be hailed and hazed by the big Other of urban modernity, global capital. In this way, the two boys become each other's mirror, each an aspect of the nomadic subject constituted by the desire of global capitalism.

Structurally, the film has a symmetrical arrangement consisting of two social triangles. The first triangle is introduced at an early stage: three

Guo Liangui captured in slow motion moving through a seemingly frozen cityscape. *Beijing Bicycle* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001).

young migrants, a country girl, Guo, and his friend from the same village. The second triangle exists between Jian, his girlfriend, and the schoolmate who wins her over. Although there is a lack of verbal communication between the country girl and the two rural young men, this trio suffers no lack of dramatic contact. The structure of symmetrical relationships is thus in place. What links the two symmetrical relationships is the bike.

The migrant girl in *Beijing Bicycle* works as a maid in the house opposite the convenience store owned by Guo's friend from his old village. Both Guo and his friend, several years Guo's senior, are attracted to the girl. They frequently peep at her through a crevice in the courtyard wall. Because of the many stylish outfits she wears, they mistake her for a city person. As her true identity is not revealed until late in the film, Guo and his friend's voyeuristic gaze at her lounging on the balcony also activates our scopic drive. What is interesting is that the gendered structure of looking in this instance is complicated by the category of class, which is relayed to us through the two male characters.[9] Although the girl has no way to return the men's look since the men are not visible to her, their look nevertheless bounces back with the force of what Roland Barthes calls 'punctum'.[10] Both men are indeed attracted to the girl primarily on the basis of sexual difference (we see Guo's friend prevent Guo from looking at her for too long on the ground that his health might be affected), but their gaze nevertheless fails to possess her image because it does not submit to or confirm their position in the symbolic as dominant. What comes into play in the gaze is the men's misrecognition of the woman as the image of the urban Other, the site of plenitude represented by all the luxury and comfort of an urban life. In looking at the girl, Guo and his friend represent themselves to themselves. They find their own otherness in the image of the girl just as they find it in their everyday encounter with the metropolis.

In this way, the girl functions not quite as the object but rather as the mediator of the men's desire.[11] When the girl comes to buy soy sauce, her high heels resound through the alley sending out waves of excitement to the men before her slender figure in elegant dress finally shows up. Closeups of her walking feet and shot/reverse-shots between men and woman are used to structure the fluttering of desire in their wordless contact. The men's gaze does fetishize the girl, but their fetishistic look has the effect of placing her off-limits rather than of possessing her. The mysterious 'city girl' never speaks, even when she gets run over one day by Guo's bike. If she did, her accent would immediately betray her. On the literal level, as Guo is advised by his friend, 'the trick is not to let anyone know you're not from here'. Her silence designates a general understanding among the migrants: the city folk will take advantage of you if they know you are a migrant. But on the symbolic level, the country girl's silence is especially important because it signifies the imaginary nature of the migrant men's relationship to the condition of existence in the metropolis. This is the significance of the girl's mistaken

9 Speaking of the different living conditions between urban residents and rural migrants, Solinger writes, 'A new two-class structure has been emerging in the cities of China: on the one side, those for whom jobs, housing, education, cheap food, and medical care are an entitlement, and on the other, those who must scramble for these goods or do without'. Solinger, 'The floating population in the cities', p. 136.

10 'Punctum' is the mark of true photography, which Barthes distinguishes from 'studium', the concept for conventionalized cultural codes. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 26–51.

11 For the concept of mediation and mediator of desire, see René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

identity. Toward the end, when her true identity is revealed, the girl properly disappears and we hear Guo's friend say 'if I had known . . .'. This 'if' tells only of a possible relationship of sexual love obstructed by fantasy. If it in any way indicates disillusionment, it does not destroy the spell of the metropolitan Other: the subject always finds other mediations.

The film's symmetrical structure makes us expect a match in the meaning production of the other trio. However, although we find that the same bike functions as Jian's object of desire as well as Guo's, the mediation of Jian's desire is much more complicated. If Jian's girlfriend is a mediator, she is likely one among several and only at an early stage. We have reason to think of Jian's rival biker as another mediator who succeeds the girl as Jian's model.

In the first trio, we find sufficient distance, albeit imaginary, between men and woman to eliminate any contact between the two spheres. But the girl in the second trio has made clear that she likes Jian and, though his family is poor, Jian is at least a Beijing resident. Besides, Jian's ambition to own a bike, possibly in imitation of a lifestyle he admires mostly because of her, is accomplished without too much difficulty. After he acquires the bike a purely gendered relationship seems to develop, which empowers Jian's ego and begins to replace the relationship of mediation. The girl eventually ceases to function as a mediator and acquires the status of the object for whom Jian and his rival compete. This is when Guo intrudes and his intervention hastens the transformation of their triangular desire. In this transformation, Jian's rival, the most skillful and therefore most 'cool' bicycle stunt performer, has become exactly what René Girard describes as typical of an 'internal mediator', who, by standing between Jian and his object (which now is the girl rather than the bike), arouses in Jian both jealousy and hatred. 'Now the mediator is a shrewd and diabolical enemy; he tries to rob the subject of his most prized possessions'.[12]

If, as Pierre Bourdieu would argue, individual behaviour is nothing other than a certain specification of the collective history of a group or

12 Ibid., p. 11.

13 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Rice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 89.

14 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 56.

15 See Rey Chow, 'Sentimental returns: on the uses of the everyday in the recent films of Zhang Yimou and Wong Kar-wai', *New Literary History*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2002), pp. 639–54, for an interesting discussion on this subject that employs Pier Paolo Pasolini's theory of cinematic signification.

16 See Dror Kochan, 'Wang Xiaoshuai', *Senses of Cinema* (September 2003), http://www.senseofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/wang.html; Elizabeth Wright, 'Riding towards the future: Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle*', *Senses of Cinema* (December 2001), http://www.senseofcinema.com/contents/01/18/beijing_bicycle.html. Both Kochan and Wright use such terms as urban realism or social realism to characterize Wang's films.

class, and each social group or class enacts a set of dispositions and practices that reveal its own particular habitus,[13] the difference between the two sets of triangular desire in *Beijing Bicycle* speaks of the difference in the habitus of the two social groups. What appears to be Guo's passive, irrational and obstinate dispositions in his pursuit of desire are much more than individual qualities; they are 'embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history'.[14] This is a history of being bound to the earth, to traditional values, without much mobility and of being accustomed to external mediations of desire instilled by socialist ideology. This history constitutes subjectivities with mixed characteristics of practicality and idealism, subjectivities that value hard work, endurance and honesty, and that cherish goodwill and revere authorities, but subjectivities ill prepared for the rapidly commercialized urban society. In contrast, Jian's dispositions embody a history of rapidly developing consumerism and of the jungle law of the market. The pattern of Jian's triangular desire intimates the pattern of consumer desire in that there is a total lack of idealism in his gaze on the world and the relationship of things replaces the relationship of humans. Since the modern in postsocialist China lies in the country's active participation in the global market, the story of Jian's internal mediation is one of imitation of consumer desire that is turning young urbanites into nomadic subjects who pledge allegiance only to commodities. And it is into this kind of habitus, structured and structuring, that young rural migrants are transplanting their own.

Thus, through the symmetrical structure of the two triangles, *Beijing Bicycle* lays open the complicated social processes of subject formation. That its objectivity of perspective and specificity of representation, a stylistic device borrowed from documentary film, succeed in dramatizing all the more keenly the ideological production of subjectivity, speaks of an irony of all cinema, perhaps all practices of realistic representation: what starts intentionally as a literal and denotative perspective inevitably acquires a symbolic value. Cinema is only more inescapably bound to this irony because film images inherently cannot be abstract.[15] Thus the more specific and concrete film images are in their spatial-temporal construction, the more irreducible their metaphoricity and abstraction. In the ostensible objectivity of a documentary style, which fails to deliver a 'real' event, lies the source of *Beijing Bicycle*'s critical poignancy.

Both *So Close to Paradise* and *Beijing Bicycle* exhibit a narrative ambiguity that is not characteristic of the kind of referential realism to which their critics usually refer them.[16] In the final analysis, the films' ambiguous mode of inquiry is more productive and ethical than would be an approach aimed at providing definitive answers. In fact, the only responsible position about the fate of the rural-to-urban migrants is to be deeply ambivalent – if we do not want to mistake our own subject positions for those of the migrants. The films' subtle experimentalism does not make the films equivocal about social suffering. This suffering, silently borne by those forced off their land, is unambiguously

17 Wright, in 'Riding towards the future', thinks that *So Close to Paradise* is more critical than *Beijing Bicycle* because the latter is more commercial. Kochan in 'Wang Xiaoshuai', also describes *So Close to Paradise* as harsher and more brutal. I think that commercial success does not necessarily mark a work as less critical. In the case of *Beijing Bicycle*, as long as the representation of social inequities in an increasingly polarized society is not compromised by dramatic tension or better image technology, viewing pleasure per se does not necessarily dull the film's critical edge. As a matter of fact, *Beijing Bicycle* has not been shown in mainland China yet (it is still being evaluated by the censors for public release). It will be interesting to see how it will be received.

18 See Ivone Margulies (ed.), *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) for a concept of 'performative realism' that does not simply represent a given reality but enacts actual social tensions.

represented; it is neither diluted by action adventure or melodrama, nor exploited for political propaganda or commercial entertainment.[17] Wang succeeds in giving rural migrants a face and a body expressive of the pain of their displacement and subject re-formation. This displacement constitutes a process that in many ways resembles the primitive accumulation of capital: it impoverishes and uproots the peasant population and pushes them to embrace the dream of individual freedom and prosperity, and will eventually turn them into an urban proletariat whose body is prepared for capital's extraction of its commodity labour power. What is different is that even though a new proletarian class is emerging, it can no longer be posited as the unified subject of history. Its agency is foreclosed by both the global failure of communism and the global success of capitalism. This foreclosure of the collective subject position and its political representation results in social tensions that eventually find their way into literature and art. This is the bigger social event evinced behind these films' rather modest representation. Insofar as the films enact the historical experience of contemporary rural migrants in China, their methods can still be described as 'realism'. What I have suggested here is that they also simultaneously challenge the conventional notions of fidelity and verisimilitude by which film realism has always been defined.[18]

Bad reputations: the reception of 'trash' cinema

ERNEST MATHIJS

1 Harry Kümel, quoted in Leo Mees, 'Filmen in Belgie: Harry Kümel', Film & Televisie, no. 161 (1970), pp. 8–9.

> All films are meant for audiences,
> Sometimes audiences aren't meant for films[1]

Trash cinema and the cultural history of cinema

The theoretical basis of the cultural study of cinema takes off from the idea that the meaning of a film is at least partly determined by its public status. As Janet Staiger, Barbara Klinger and Thomas Austin have noted, marketing and reception contexts, both historical and topical, play a crucial role in determining the public meaning of a film text and explaining the creation of reputation, hypes and controversy.[2]

2 Janet Staiger, Interpreting Films; Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema (Princeton, NH: Princeton University Press, 1992); Barbara Klinger, Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); Thomas Austin, Hollywood, Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
3 Janet Staiger, 'Hitchcock in Texas: intertextuality in the face of blood and Gore', in Perverse Spectators: the Practices of Film Reception (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2000), pp. 179–87.
4 Barbara Klinger, 'Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies', Screen, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 107–28

But the underlying assumption of this argument often seems to be that marketing and reception are single-issue activities: homogenous, coherent and uniform. When Staiger, for instance, describes the controversy caused by The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974), she treats the different instances of its reception as a whole – instead of describing a process she offers a snapshot.[3] In historical reality, reception is rarely unitary. More often, it consists of many competing and opposite discourses, struggling for dominance and stretched out over several time-frames. Klinger addresses this problem by distinguishing between, and arguing for, a combination of diachronic and synchronic approaches to film history.[4] Besides pointing out the difficulty of studying a text not just historically but within its own time-frame(s), Klinger's two concepts also problematize the exact starting moment of a film's reception. When taking the synchronic history of a film into account one is forced – if only through paying

attention to the regular production and distribution practices of the time – to study the lead-up to the film's reception. This has the curious consequence that its inception and marketing become as important as the actual reception of the film. From a different perspective, Rick Altman's conceptualization of 'the producer's game' and 'the critic's game' as two discourses governing (or at least accompanying) the construction of genre contexts for films before and after their release suggests a similar conclusion: the pursuit of information from the time of the film's inception (which is an obvious influence on the film's further development) and its significance for the ways in which the film is eventually presented and received raise the theoretical problem that the discourse of its reception actually starts long before it is received.[5]

Klinger's and Altman's arguments are very useful for considering how, theoretically at least, the cultural history of popular cinema needs to be studied. But can we push Klinger's argument one step further and develop tools for the combined analysis of diachronic and synchronic discourses? Altman offers such a tool when he isolates the semantic unities used in genre discourses as units for analysis (and as units of generic labeling). But he is less precise about which discursive materials need to be included here. In fact, the question of *how* one needs to treat reception materials as part of either (or both) synchronic or diachronic discourses remains problematic. Taking Klinger and Altman to task, Martin Barker argues for the recognition of 'ancillary discourses' in the historical reception of films.[6] Barker's emphasis on the analysis of the discourses used in ancillary materials comes closer to being a tool for making distinctions between the different discourses operating within the battlefield of reception, as it allows comparisons of discourses (of kinds of 'talk' about films) across practices and over time, but it is insufficiently discriminatory; discourses are lumped together as all being more or less equally important. No clear means of distinguishing between more (or less) powerful discourses, or discourses from different origins, is offered.

What is needed is what I call a reception trajectory: an integrated view of specific discourses operating in particular situations (synchronically) and as processes over time (diachronically), all analyzed as types of 'talk' about film – all with their own rhetorical significance – in order to map both the individual strategies used to forge meaning (or fail to), as well as their combinations (and the specific ways in which these are obtained rhetorically). This provides a view of the complex pattern of influences and opinions that makes up a film's reception. It seems logical that the main way of laying out the reception trajectory of a film would be chronologically, starting at its inception and synchronically linking it to discourses already operating, but where would it end? As Barker's and Austin's work on the reception of films in the 1990s has shown, the status and reputation of films shift quite regularly.[7] Yet they are not reinvented every single time. In my own study of the reception of David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) and *The Fly* (1986), I came to the

5 Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

6 The term used by Barker is actually 'ancillary materials'. See Martin Barker, 'News, reviews, clues, interviews and other ancillary materials – a critique and research proposal', *Scope: Online Journal of Film Studies* (February 2004), http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/articles/news-reviews.htm. In this paper I prefer to use 'ancillary discourses', thus allowing for the inclusion of non-materialistic elements in the description.

7 See Martin Barker, Jane Arthurs and Ramaswami Harindranath, *The Crash Controversy: Censorship Campaigns and Film Reception* (London: Wallflower Press, 2001); Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, pp. 195–8.

8 Ernest Mathijs, 'The making of a cult reputation: topicality and controversy in the critical reception of *Shivers*', in Mark Jancovich et al. (eds), *Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 109–26; Ernest Mathijs, 'AIDS References in the critical reception of David Cronenberg: 'It may not be such a bad disease after all', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2003), pp. 29–45.

9 Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, pp. 64–5.

10 Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: a Hollywood Icon in World Culture* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Kevin Heffernan, 'Inner-city exhibition and the genre film: distributing *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2002), pp. 59–77.

11 It is gradually becoming a well-established practice to stress reception when studying cult and trash films. Next to the work of Staiger on *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Staiger, 'Hitchcock in Texas'), Erb on *King Kong* (Erb, *Tracking King Kong*) and Heffernan on *Night of the Living Dead* (Heffernan, 'Inner-city exhibition'), there are several essays on reception in Graeme Harper and Xavier Mendik, *Unruly Pleasures: the Cult Film and its Critics* (Guildford: FAB Press, 2000); Eric Schaefer also puts considerable emphasis on reception in his chapters on distribution, advertising exhibition, and censorship in his *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 96–135, 136–64. Similar emphases can be found, if less explicitly, in Thomas Doherty, 'American teenagers and teenpics, 1955–1957: a study of exploitation filmmaking', in Bruce Austin (ed.), *Current Research in Film* Volume II (Norwood: Ablex Publishing 1986), pp. 47–61.

12 Mark Betz's study of the reception of European cinema in the US exploitation market gives good examples. Kevin Heffernan's study

conclusion that once a particular connection between different discourses on the film's meaning have been reached and subsequently labeled (as in the connection between the themes of body horror, physical decay and sexuality through the metaphor of AIDS in *The Fly*) discourses on a film's reception seem to reach a 'final moment', consolidating a film's meaning culturally. After that, amendments may remain possible, but the main consensus is seldom disturbed.[8]

In this essay, I aim to provide an example of such a trajectory to further the theoretical understanding of the reception of trash cinema and the study of cinematic reputations. Though the category of 'trash cinema' is, of course, a fluid one, especially when poised against either 'canonical' or 'mainstream' cinema, and though it is subject to change (and indeed films themselves often oscillate between these categories), trash cinema, and cult cinema in general, provide a challenge to reception studies. The films' reception is almost never simultaneous across territories, and rarely features the short *hausse* in attention that Thomas Austin describes as hype, after which interest in mainstream films often seems to disappear.[9] Instead trash films seem, like *sleepers*, to stick around. But unlike canonized cinema, whose reception trajectory also covers long periods of time, the films' reputations never seem to settle. They continuously move in and out of favour, in and out of the legitimate focus of film studies. As Cynthia Erb's study of the long-term status of *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, 1933) and Kevin Heffernan's analysis of the exhibition of *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) confirm, the identification of trash cinema depends heavily upon constructions of meaning relating to the conditions under which the films were made, or on the circumstances under which audiences have received them.[10] Trash cinema's reputation is often the result of conditions of creation, marketing, reception and a wide range of cultural contexts, determining to a great extent (if not completely) their status as film texts.[11] In what follows, then, I will analyze the reception trajectory of the Belgian vampire film *Les lèvres rouges/Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel, 1971), a film whose status in film history is continually under debate. Described as both a masterwork *and* rubbish, it defies short-term reception accounts, and its frequent moves in and out of the public interest (unlike *King Kong* or *Night of the Living Dead*) challenges theories of reception. Neither the film's subject nor its trajectory are unique in cinema history (one can easily think of similar examples of 'eurotrash' or cult horror cinema),[12] but precisely because they apply to other films seen as part of trash cinema they also provide an excellent example for the study of trash cinema reception. I will sketch the cultural context in which the film came into being, lay out its production circumstances, discuss its marketing strategies, and concentrate on its initial reception, both critically and publicly, detailing the frames of reference and rhetorical strategies employed. I will also analyze the film's long-term reception, particularly singling out extrinsic

of the marketing and reception of
US horror cinema is another good
source for examples. See Mark
Betz, 'Art, exploitation,
underground', in Jancovich et al.
(eds), *Defining Cult Movies*, pp.
202–22; Kevin Heffernan, *Ghouls,
Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films
and the American Movie Business
1953–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke
University Press, 2004).

13 See Ernest Mathijs, 'Daughters of
Darkness', in Ernest Mathijs (ed.),
The Cinema of the Low Countries
(London: Wallflower Press, 2004),
pp. 96–106.

14 Daniel Van Avermaet, 'De
fantastische film: voor wat meer
begrip', *Film & Televisie*, no. 176
(January 1972), pp. 18–19.

15 Gilbert Verschooten, 'De
fantastische film: op de drempel
van erkenning?', *Film & Televisie*,
no. 318 (November 1983),
p. 24–5. For a more detailed
discussion of the reception of
horror in Belgian cinema, see:
Ernest Mathijs, '*Man bites Dog*
and the critical reception of
Belgian horror (in) cinema', in
Steven Jay Schneider and Tony
Williams (eds), *Horror
International* (Detroit, IL: Wayne
State University Press, 2005),
pp. 315–35.

16 Godfroid Courtmans, 'Le cinema
cochon', *Special*, no. 29 (August
1973), p. 39.

17 Marianne Thys (ed.), *Belgian
Cinema – Le cinema belge – de
Belgische film* (Ghent: Ludion,
1999), p. 542. See also Philip
Mosley, *Split Screen: Belgian
Cinema and Cultural Identity*
(New York, NY: SUNY Press,
2001), pp. 121–5. Oddly enough,
the same standards were not
always as rigorously applied to
foreign films. This meant for
instance that Daniel Van
Avermaet, one critic specializing
in fantastic cinema, could, in the
course of one year (1972), publish
unapologetically positive reviews
of foreign B-films like *Requiem
pour un vampire* (Jean Rollin,
1971), *Le frisson des vampires*
(Jean Rollin, 1970), *Twins of Evil*
(John Hough, 1971), *Jonathan,
Vampire sterben nicht* (Hans
Geissendörfer, 1970), *Lust for a
Vampire* (Jimmy Sangster, 1970)

references and the development of the 'legend' in order to pinpoint some particular issues raised by a reception approach towards trash cinema.

Belgian film culture and the making of *Daughters of Darkness*

Belgian film culture at the beginning of the 1970s can best be described as both dynamic and dualist.[13] The introduction, in the mid 1960s, of direct state support for the production of films, and a greater permissiveness within global film culture, boosted national film production, facilitating a new wave of Belgian film. Within this new wave, a strict distinction arose between commercial/exploitation cinema and auteurist/culturally relevant cinema, with a clear critical preference for the latter. Occasionally, attempts were made to challenge this situation. Journals like *Le Journal de Jonathan Harker*, which published eight issues between 1967 and 1968, and *Fantoom*, which published six issues between 1975 and 1979, tried to put horror films and fantastic cinema on the agenda but failed to have significant impact. A five-article series on fantastic cinema in *Film & Televisie*, the leading Flemish film journal, that argued for a less dismissive approach to horror and fantasy, carried as a telling subtitle: 'For a *somewhat* better understanding'.[14] Overall, however, horror and fantastic cinema were 'dismissed by the film press and the "right-minded" public opinion' because of their 'challenge to morality', as Gilbert Verschooten has stated.[15] The same applied for erotic and pornographic materials, even though these were, according to another dissident voice of the time, Godefroid Courtmans, 'participating vigorously in the birth of Belgian cinema'.[16] By reducing horror, sex and violence to their moral implications, critics avoided discussing their potential cultural relevance for Belgian film. Unsurprisingly, then, Belgian permissive commercial cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s was often equated with trash because of its 'lack of moral concern'.[17]

From its inception, *Daughters of Darkness* fell between the commercial/exploitation and auteurist/culturally relevant frameworks.[18] The troubled reception of *Monsieur Hawarden* (1968), his feature debut, made Kümel look consciously for a way to address both frames simultaneously, thus challenging the norms of Belgian film interpretation. The next project had to be exploitative and artistic at the same time:

> I was so angry about *Monsieur Hawarden* being so badly received here and my next project *Malpertuis* [1974] was too expensive so I said 'we are going to do something nasty'. Sex was coming up quickly, along with violence, horror and chic arty arty. I'll read something.[19]

Kümel eventually decided to base his film on the legend of Elizabeth Bathory, and wrote a contemporary version, together with Pierre Drouot (who remains uncredited in most publicity materials), asking his cowriter to bear in mind 'that it would be undignified trash'.[20] *Daughters of*

and *Vampire Circus* (Robert Young, 1971). See *Film & Televisie*, nos 185–6 (1972), pp. 36–39, 36–37.

18 Bonnie Zimmerman calls Kümel a 'film historian and academic'. While not true in the strict sense, Kümel did (and still does) have this reputation, both as film teacher and passionate lecturer on film culture. See Bonnie Zimmerman, 'Lesbian vampires: *Daughters of Darkness*', *Jump Cut*, nos. 24/25 (1981), pp. 23–4.

19 David Soren, *Unreal Reality: the Cinema of Harry Kümel* (Columbia, MI: Lucas Brothers Publishers, 1979), p. 25.

20 Ibid., p. 28.

21 Called 'Shocking Films' in the English advertisement of the film.

22 Paul Geens (ed.), *Naslagwerk over de Vlaamse film* (Brussels: CIAM, 1986), p. 297.

23 Gilbert Verschooten, *Harry Kümel* (Brussels: Fantasy Films, 1985), p. 15.

24 Ibid.

25 Gemini insisted on US actor John Karlen and Canadian actress Danielle Ouimet (Miss Quebec, 1966), Roxy wanted Andrea Rau, and Maya Films managed to obtain world sales rights. Even before the actual shooting of the film distribution deals were made with other companies, such as Panmovies (Switzerland) and Maron Films (USA), in exchange for financing. At this stage, unraveling the production structure of *Daughters of Darkness* is very difficult. Most contracts mention (or assume) Maya Film as world sales holder, and Gemini Pictures as most important financer. However, several letters of credit also suggest that distributors like Panmovies played a substantial part in financing the film. In an ad in *Variety*, published after the film's release in the USA, no less than thirteen financing partners are mentioned. *Variety*, 13 May 1971, p. 85.

26 *Francis Bolen's Newsletter*, no. 204 (1970).

27 Gijs Van De Westelaken, 'Interview met Harry Kümel', pp. 29–41.

Darkness tells the story of a vampire countess and her female servant who seduce a newly-wed American couple on their honeymoon in a hotel in Ostend. Drouot's company, Showking Films,[21] which he had set up with Paul Collet, was the initial producer. It was decided that the subject matter of *Daughters of Darkness* was on the one hand probably too risque to receive state funding, and on the other hand commercially viable enough to be able to find coproducers, especially after French film star Delphine Seyrig (from *L'annee derniere a Marienbad/Last Year In Marienbad* [Alain Resnais, 1961]) got involved in the project. According to Kümel, the decision not to apply for state funding was a very conscious one:

> When I knew the film commission was going to find the project too expensive, I decided I had had enough. I was going to make a film without government support,[22]

In another comment, Kümel is even more explicit about the link with the film commission: 'Of course, I wanted to show these people that I didn't need them'.[23] Still, a little further on in the same interview he insists the film was in no way a 'revenge' on the film commission, but a trashy joke instead:

> All we knew was that we intended to make a commercial picture, with erotic as well as violent scenes, and that we wanted Delphine Seyrig for the lead role.... It was just a question of getting a young and beautiful couple to fuck as much as possible, with a maximum of bloody scenes in between. A real commercial machine! But we thought that wasn't enough, so we also decided to include erotic and chic elements. In that respect we were the predecessors of *Emmanuelle*.[24]

With Seyrig attached to the project, Showking Films managed to find several other production companies to invest: Cinevog (Belgium), Maya Films (France), Gemini Pictures International (USA), Roxy Films (Germany), and Mediterranea (Italy), making it the most international Belgian production so far. Inevitably each of these producers wanted their say over the material, resulting in a lot of disputes.[25] Shooting took place on location (in Ostend) from May 1970 on, while the story was set in the winter.[26] It was marred by flaming rows between director and cast: Kümel reportedly hit Danielle Ouimet, and was disgusted with the work of John Karlen and Andrea Rau. He also became dissatisfied with the pressure under which he had had to work from both budgetary restrictions (resulting in several last minute script changes, such as the final scene in which Seyrig is impaled), and Seyrig's acting attitude (according to Kümel, she was 'reluctant', 'self-destructive', and 'difficult').[27] Kümel afterwards produced three foreign-language versions (English, French and Dutch), and got into a disagreement over the final cut of the film, resulting in two different versions (an English-language version of eighty-seven minutes, and a French language version

28 According to Kümel, Jaquin of Maya Films insisted on the change: 'Monsieur Kümel, ne m'apprenez pas mon métier. Lorsqu'on le nommera Le Rouge aux lèvres, les gens de la province croiront qu'il s'agit d'un film sur des cosmetiques.' Quoted in Verschooten, Harry Kümel, p. 15.

29 Kümel disassociates himself from the film in Mees, 'Filmen in Belgie', pp. 8–9. He revisits this dismissal in: Van De Westelaken, 'Interview met Harry Kümel', pp. 29–41.

30 See the chapter on the production and release of King Kong, in Erb, Tracking King Kong, pp. 31–63.

31 See Barker, 'News, reviews, clues'.

32 See Austin, Hollywood, Hype and Audiences, p. 24.

33 See: Ernest Mathijs, 'The "wonderfully scary monster" and the international reception of horror: Ridley Scott's Hannibal (2001)', Kinoeye, http://www.kinoeye.org/; Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance (eds), From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings (New York, NY and Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, forthcoming).

34 For instance: 'Le rouge aux lèvres', Journal du Show Business, 5 June 1970; Marcel Vermeulen, 'Le rouge aux lèvres', Le Soir, 16 July 1970; 'Delphine Seyrig: vedette d'un film belge', La Libre Belgique, 23 July 1970; 'Pastische: Delphine Seyrig: tous des c...', Pariscope, 9 September 1970; '300.000 paillettes...', Elles, 28 October 1970; See also Soren, Unreal Reality, pp. 29–30. Soren also gives a brief overview of how the Belgian press published stories about Kümel filming Daughters of Darkness (pp. 36–7).

35 See Jean De Bongnie, 'Les cas des jeunes cineastes', Amis du Film (March 1972), p. 9, and 'Le belge a-t-il la tete cinematographique?', Amis du Film (April 1972), pp. 6–7.

of ninety-six minutes). The initial title, *Le rouge aux lèvres*, was dropped in favour of *Les lèvres rouges*,[28] which was subsequently translated/transformed into numerous local versions, which I discuss below. Finally, Kümel disassociated himself from the film before its premiere, which was set for the USA in May 1971.[29]

Controlling prefiguration and reception (or not)

Prerelease discourses are to be weighed differently than post-release discussions; they are less public and – especially in the early 1970s – often confined to knowledge only shared by a small part of the film market. Still – and bearing in mind that the early 1970s is also the period in which specialized film and fan publications generated an increasing interest in trash cinema – it is not difficult to see how this context must have led to mixed expectations about the film. Most pre-premiere publicity materials provided by the producers of *Daughters of Darkness* emphasize the eroticism and violence in the film, tying it to a trend of similar films, thus inviting a specific reception. This is not unusual. Film companies have long capitalized on pre-production tales about the circumstances under which films were made, in order to invite a particular reception.[30] According to Barker, we need to see these ancillary pieces of information as 'prefigurative processes', important ways of setting up a film for an audience, inviting that audience to see it in a specific way.[31] Austin even goes so far to suggest that these 'satellite texts' are part of conscious production processes, developed to respond to and manage problematic discourses surrounding films.[32] More recently, 'making of' videos and programmes and notes in press kits also function as attempts to streamline receptions, and directors have been playing this game for decades. In the case of franchises, such as *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott, 2001) and the *Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001–3), it is even a factor in how the film will be constructed and should be read.[33]

Yet, in the case of *Daughters of Darkness*, there also seems to be a different component to this process. Several elements of the production tales and circumstances seem *not* to have been used in the effort to invite certain receptions. It is perhaps understandable that there is no reference to Kümel's reputation as an auteur, since the producers probably aimed for a release as exploitation cinema *tout court*. Similarly, nothing is said about the artistic intentions of the film, to the point where there is hardly any emphasis on Seyrig, who was supposed to be its 'artistic passport'.[34] There were numerous interviews with Seyrig when she announced she was going to appear in Kümel's film, but this was not picked up by the pre-premiere production publicity. More remarkably, the ancillary materials also make no mention of Kümel's reputation as the *enfant terrible* of Belgian cinema, a reputation that had been widely publicized during the shooting of the film, and to which Kümel himself often referred (especially in his clashes with the film commission).[35] Equally,

36 Kümel has said this on several occasions, and even if it was only a stunt phrase to bring his film attention, it is strange that the quote was not used in preparing its promotion. See Geens (ed.), *Naslagwerk over de Vlaamse film*, p. 297.

37 Again, this was something addressed during the shooting of the film. See, for instance, Mees, 'Filmen in Belgie', pp. 8–9.

38 It is remarkable that when I spoke to people involved in the production of *Daughters of Darkness*, several of them, especially from the production assistance crew, refer to it as 'professionally trashy' (a badly-made film), adding to that a fundamental dislike of Kümel's professional attitude on and off the set (and of Paul Collet too).

39 Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*; Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: the Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

40 *Variety*, 9 June 1971, p. 13. *Daughters of Darkness* was at number 39.

no mentions were made of Kümel's previous film, *Monsieur Hawarden*, not even references to its 'sexual tone'. Neither were there any references to sensational production stories (the fact that Kümel initially wanted 700 to 800 virgins in the film, or that it features Miss Quebec 1966).[36] The materials do not even cash in on the film's international profile.[37]

In short, the producers seemed unable (or unwilling) to organize the confusing production circumstances into a controlled effort to regulate the film's reception, leaving numerous loosely connected facts about the kind of film they were offering flying around. Failing to set *Daughters of Darkness* up as either an artistic experiment or a commercial exploitation (or both) inevitably confused local distributors, giving the impression of a messy, sloppy, less-than-professional product. The professional failure to control reception may well be a key factor in why the film ended up being labeled 'trash'.[38]

Forging a dual framework: release and reception in the USA

Unsurprisingly, the confusion over the initial intention of *Daughters of Darkness* as a 'trashy' but chic exploitation film, the tales of difficulties during production (with uncertainties concerning authorship, screenplay, production, title, length and origin), and the failure to use these in a straightforward presentation of the film worked through in its reception. Eric Schaefer's research on exploitation exhibition and Barbara Wilinsky's work on art-house cinema exhibition strategies can serve as a point of reference to show how *Daughters of Darkness* followed a quite distinctive trajectory in establishing the connection between pre-release information and post-release evaluation, one relating to both exploitative and art-house strategies.[39]

By far the most significant ancillary discourse connected to *Daughters of Darkness* is its initial reception in the USA, not just because it was the first post-release public presence of the film, on very visible (and well-respected) platforms, but also because it became the point of reference for subsequent receptions. *Daughters of Darkness*, as the film was officially titled in the USA, was first released on three screens in New York on 28 May 1971. It quickly became a huge success, drawing $46,667 in its first ten days (setting a house record at the New Embassy with $7680 on a Sunday), and making it into the *Variety* list of '50 top-grossing films',[40] before it was released on forty screens throughout the New York area. The publicity campaign, set up by the distributor Gemini, concentrated on two elements. On the one hand it emphasized the lesbian vampire theme (typified by Ouimet's and Seyrig's faces on the poster), tying the film closely to similar materials that were moderately successful, like Hammer films (*Lust for a Vampire* [Jimmy Sangster, 1971], *Twins of Evil* [John Hough, 1971]), Jean Rollin's films, or *La Rose Ecorchée/Blood Rose* (Claude Mulot, 1969). On the other hand, US publicity materials also stressed the film's artistic

pretensions, drawing heavily upon reviewers' quotes. In the same issue of *Variety* that carried the top-grossing list, a fullpage advertisement for *Daughters of Darkness* carried the entire *New York Times* film review at its centre, surrounded by twelve other quotes from reviews.[41] Several of these mention the lesbian vampire theme, with phrases like 'It's lesbian time in Transylvania!', 'A group-sex round, with Miss Seyrig's chum seducing the boy honeymooner while she takes over the bride', or 'A vampire story in modern dress! Lesbianism, homosexuality and nude scenes!', emphasizing the trashy elements of the film. Yet others refer to the film as 'a lady vampire first class', and, most importantly, 'far and

41 Ibid.

The ambiguous reception of *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel, 1971): *New York Times* review in a *Variety* ad. Picture courtesy: Library of the Belgian Royal Film Archive.

42 Howard Thompson, 'Film: artistic
vampires', New York Times,
29 May 1971.

43 Gerr., 'Daughters of Darkness',
Variety, 26 May 1971.

44 Ibid.

45 See Dan Scapperotti, 'Daughters
of Darkness', Cinefantastique,
no. 4 (1971), p. 33.

46 The Filmfacts critical digest of the
film mentions a balanced
evaluation ('4 favorable, 1 mixed,
4 negative'). Filmfacts (1971),
p. 377. See, for instance, Michael
Kernan, 'Daughters of Darkness',
The Washington Post, 2 December
1971; Judith Crist, 'Daughters of
Darkness', New York Post, 6 July
1971.

47 Quoted in Soren, Unreal Reality,
pp. 37–40. Soren also refers to
reviews from The New York Post,
New York Daily News, and
reviews by Bob Salmaggi, and
Judith Crist.

48 Scapperotti, 'Daughters of
Darkness', p. 33.

away the most artistic vampire shocker in 10 years'. This quote actually came from the *New York Times* review, and was repeated in the heading of the advertisement.

US reviews emphasized both the exploitative and the artistic qualities of the film. The *New York Times* review used references to horror cliches when stating that the film 'will glue you to your seat', but at the same time described the film as 'subtle, stately, stunningly colored and exquisitely directed', referring to both *Et mourir de plaisir/Blood and Roses* (Roger Vadim, 1960) and *Last Year in Marienbad* as comparable material.[42] The *Variety* review also noted that *Daughters of Darkness* was no typical exploitation film, and different from the kind of films usually associated with the vampire theme.[43] It suggested that this film 'demands a special sell if isn't going to be lost in the mire of the conventionally bloody exploitation market', thus drawing attention to the producers' failure to set the film up for a specific reception.[44] Similarly, the fan-oriented press, which was at that time starting to gain momentum, received *Daughters of Darkness* as a dual film, too artistic to be reduced to mere exploitation, but at the same time too explicitly concerned with sex and violence to be received outside the exploitative framework.[45] In all cases, the film got a moderately positive evaluation.[46]

It seems, then, that the US reviews succeeded in doing what the producers had failed to do: they understood the film's intentional dual tone, between exploitation and art. Yet, when we take into account *how* they argued about the film, it seems that there are certain oddities, telling us perhaps more about the conditions of reviewing than about the film itself. First of all there is a distinct difference in tone between the reviews' references to the exploitation and the artistic elements of the film. The arguments about exploitation are phrased in bold language, using exclamation marks, slang and jokes (like the comparison between vampirism and modern times). By contrast, arguments about the artistic elements of the film tend to be phrased in more subtle, careful language, using terms associated with art criticism and auteurism. On the whole, this gives the impression that the film is not so much an integrated whole as a succession of scenes, some beautiful, others saucy. Second, several reviews problematize the film's style. Its look is often described as 'typically French' (sic), 'of surreal beauty', 'detached', or 'cold', possessing an 'overt Freudian and Surrealistic intellectual quality', especially in relation to Seyrig's acting style.[47] This could have been the start of a discussion of the artfulness of the film, but the reviews rarely proceed beyond mentioning *Last Year in Marienbad* (an obvious reference), or Vadim's *Blood and Roses*. Instead, they present the observation on the coolness of the film as a problem, as a way of claiming that it is a film *not* belonging to the Gothic horror tradition (*Cinefantastique* explicitly references 'Hammer's forthcoming *Countess Dracula*' [Peter Sasdy, 1971]),[48] or to any other established tradition. The fact that the film's beauty is seen

as a problem of classification undermines the validity of its description as an art film or a horror film. Dan Scapperotti points a finger at the producers:

> Had the producers made a straight horror film rather than a stylized drama as a stage for Delphine Seyrig's performance, they might have had a successful film.[49]

This is to reinforce the impression that the look of *Daughters of Darkness* is less intention than effect, a signal of its unevenness. Also remarkable is the use of references to the film's self-mocking tone, described as irony, or 'impure camp'.[50] Although this is something that could be inferred from the film's intentions (Kümel describing the film project as a joke), it more likely fulfils a function within the reviews to bind together the seemingly contradictory strands of praise for the isolated artistic elements and tolerance (or mocking) of the film's obvious exploitative. Making it sound as if the film is being ironic about itself saves the reviews from sounding incoherent.[51]

The implications of these oddities are important. They cause *Daughters of Darkness* to be seen as uneven or unfinished, regardless of the overall evaluation. As such, they transfer the reputation of 'trashiness' from the presentation of the film to its critical reception, making it look confused, incomplete and a 'Belgian disaster'.[52] The fact that the film went on to become the most successful Belgian film ever in the USA only adds to the confusion. Its (expected) success is usually described as an inability to rise above its exploitative limitations.

Sex as politics: release and reception in Europe

The successive receptions of *Daughters of Darkness* in other territories show much similarity to that of the USA. In each country, it was a considerable commercial success. René Michelems writes that 'the film went on to enjoy an enormous success, in Paris as much as in Britain and the States',[53] and Frédéric Sojcher calls the film's box-office results in Paris 'unsurpassed by any other Belgian film up until now'.[54] At first sight, the way *Daughters of Darkness* was promoted also mirrored the US publicity campaign. French and German posters and ads showed the same picture (of Seyrig and Ouimet), and review quotes were used to point to the film's qualities. And, like the US *Variety* campaign, box-office references were used, pointing to the film's success in the USA and the UK, stating that *Daughters of Darkness* was 'le film français (sic) qui triomphe en Amerique et en Angleterre'.[55] Unlike in the US promotion campaign however, no attempts were made to build on the dualism of the film (as both an aesthetic achievement *and* an exploitation picture). Instead, the French promotion campaign, focused solely on artistic qualities, singling out the screenplay and the mise-en-scene, and making much of the film's 'fascinating beauty'.[56] The German promotion, on the

49 Ibid.

50 Gerr., 'Daughters of Darkness'.

51 The Royal Film Archive folder of press clippings also contains parts of *The Village Voice* review of *Daughters of Darkness*, which is decidedly negative, but also features the art–exploitation dualism, as well as references to camp to attempt to establish a logical connection between arguments.

52 John Macker, 'Daughters ravaged', *Campus Digest – University of Missouri, Columbia*, 12 July 1977.

53 In Thys (ed.), *Belgian Cinema*, p. 483.

54 Frédéric Sojcher, *La kermesse heroique du cinema belge (Volume II: 1965–1988)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p. 69.

55 This comes from an ad appearing in the French popular weekly *France-Soir*, 28 November 1971.

56 This comes from an unidentified ad, found in the Royal Film Archive.

EIN FARBFILM DER ROXY-FILM, MÜNCHEN,
DER SHOWKING-FILMS, BRÜSSEL
UND DER MAYA-FILMS, PARIS
INTER-VERLEIH

BLUT
an den
LIPPEN

57 These come from the German
press kit, found in the Royal Film
Archive.

58 Most French-speaking sources
mention veteran screenwriter
Jean Ferry as contributor to the
screenplay; most British sources
name 'J.J. Amiel' as screenwriter
(see cover sleeve of the Tartan
video edition). The German
release materials, however,
mention 'Manfred Köhler' as
second screenwriter. Neither
Amiel nor Köhler have a record on
the Internet Movie Database.

other hand, only references the exploitative elements of the film. The press kit for Germany contains numerous possible catch phrases, like 'Ein Vampir-Horror-Sexfilm', or 'Ein sexgeladener Vampir geht um', without any reference to artistic qualities. Seyrig is not even mentioned. Similarly, posters and ads downplay Seyrig's appearance (her face is only in the background of the poster), while giving much more space and attention to sexual nudity (Rau and Karlen making love, Ouimet and Karlen making love, Rau naked).[57] This difference seems to indicate that, in Europe, the film was marketed much more straightforwardly for either art-house audiences or exploitation networks. At the very least, it indicates that European distributors, all of whom were involved in the financing of the film, had far clearer ideas about who they wanted to reach.

Yet although this seems to infer that local European release campaigns were quite well focused, much confusion remains about the exact nature of the film. Local distributors found that they were presented with information that was significantly different from that in neighbouring territories. One symptomatic example here is the uncertainty about who contributed to the screenplay. British, French and German materials all list different screenwriters; it remains unclear if these writers actually contributed, or even if they were anything more than made-up names, intended to give a 'local ring' to the production.[58] Another example of this confusion are the different titles of the film. Following the change of the original title, *Le rouge aux lèvres*, into the more exploitatative *Les lèvres rouges*, further different titles kept occurring in publicity and release materials. The fact that yet another title had been used in the country in which the film was first released (*Daughters of Darkness* in the

59 The Royal Film Archive database and the Internet Movie Database list the following titles: *Le rouge aux lèvres, Les lèvres rouges, Daughters of Darkness, Blut and den Lippen, Dorst naar Bloed, Blood Love, Blood on the Lips, Blood on Her Lips, The Promise of Red Lips, The Red Lips, The Redness of Lips, Erzebeth, Children of the Night*, and *Vestala di Satane*.

60 See: Nigel Andrews, 'Daughters of Darkness', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1971, p. 203; Penelope Houston, 'Daughters of Darkness', *New Statesman*, 10 September 1971; David Robinson, 'Tall stories', *The Financial Times*, 10 September 1971; Kim Newman, 'Daughters of Darkness + The Velvet Vampire', *City Limits*, 14–20 September 1971, p. 30.

61 *Daughters of Darkness* review in *The Guardian*, 13 September 1971.

62 See, for instance, Andrews, 'Daughters of Darkness', p. 203; Robinson, 'Tall stories'.

63 Robert Chazal, 'Les lèvres rouges ... de sang', *France-Soir*, 28–29 November 1971; Jacob Gillies, 'Les lèvres rouges', *L'Express*, 29 November–5 December 1971; Gilles Plazy, 'Les lèvres rouges', *Le Monde*, 1 December 1971; Louis Chauvet, 'Les lèvres rouges (vampires de charme)', *Le Figaro*, 1 December 1971; 'L'annee derniere a Ostende', *Lettres francaises*, 1 December 1971; Dominique Bosselet, 'Delphine Seyrig: une vamp vampire blonde a couper le souffle', *France-Soir*, 2 December 1971; Henry Chapier, 'Les lèvres rouges', *Le Combat*, 7 December 1971; 'Les lèvres rouges', *Minute*, no. 503 (December 1971); 'Les lèvres rouges', *Match*, 4 December 1971; Max Tessier, 'Les lèvres rouges', *Ecran*, no. 2 (February 1972), pp. 69–70; H.N., 'Les lèvres rouges', *Positif*, no. 136 (March 1972), pp. 73–4; 'Les lèvres rouges', *Le tribune de Geneve*, 4–5 March 1972.

64 Gillies, 'Les lèvres rouges'.

65 Plazy, 'Les lèvres rouges'.

66 Ibid.

67 Chapier, 'Les lèvres rouges'; H.N., 'Les lèvres rouges'; Chauvet, 'Les lèvres rouges (vampires de charme)'.

USA), only added to the confusion. Eventually, no less than fourteen different titles were used in the European reception of the film, ranging from the clearly exploitative, like the Italian title *Vestala di Satane* (*Satan's Virgins*), through the more softcore-oriented *The Promise of Red Lips* (UK alternative title), and literal translations like *Blood on her Lips* (UK title), *Blut an den Lippen* (German title) and *Dorst naar bloed* (Dutch title), to such ambiguous titles as *Erzebeth* (unknown origin) and *Children of the Night* (unknown origin).[59]

These differences and confusions can be traced also in the European reception of *Daughters of Darkness*. Much like their American counterparts, most European reviewers seemed to like the film to some extent, but were unable to treat it as either a straightforward exploitation piece or an aesthetic accomplishment (or failure). In Britain, the first European country in which the film was released, it received a moderately positive critical reception, both in the general press and the film press, much like the US critical reception.[60] A symptomatic example is the review in *The Guardian*, which refers to the film as 'a fine piece of camp', that is a 'better than average fang yarn'.[61] It demonstrates a dual tone when referring to the artistic and exploitative elements respectively, and attempts to read camp and irony into the film, or to focus on campy elements in an effort to link the dual tones together. The only notable difference from the USA is that British reviews tend to make more references to Kümel's previous film, *Monsieur Hawarden*.[62]

A particularly interesting position is occupied by the French reception of *Daughters of Darkness*. At first glance, French reviews seem to have much in common with American reviews, both emphasizing the dual tone of the film.[63] Most famously captured in the catch phrase 'c'est Dracula à Marienbad', they usually refer to the coolness of the film, attributing it to its resemblance to *L'année dernière à Marienbad*.[64] Apart from the coolness, the aesthetics and philosophy of the sexual themes in the film also receive much attention, including references to 'Freudian mythology', and Vadim's *Blood and Roses*.[65] In some cases, reviewers even attempt to bring in highbrow artistic references, to Giorgio De Chirico, surrealism, and Paul Delvaux, as if they were treating *Daughters of Darkness* as a piece of visual art rather than as a vampire movie. Whenever these references abound, the overall evaluation of the film is positive.

Although outspoken references to both exploitation and artistic pretensions rarely occur within a single article, French reviews do try to connect arguments to both by bringing up the 'parodical' qualities of the film.[66] For example, the review in *Le Combat* uses terms such as 'strange' and 'kitsch' in its explanation of why *Daughters of Darkness* was a 'beautiful', yet 'uneven' film; in *Le Figaro* its quality of '*grand guignol*' is praised, and in *Positif* the film is credited with a 'humorous' tone.[67]

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40p

Exploitation marketing and irony: the UK reception of *Daughters of Darkness*. Picture courtesy: Library of the Belgian Royal Film Archive.
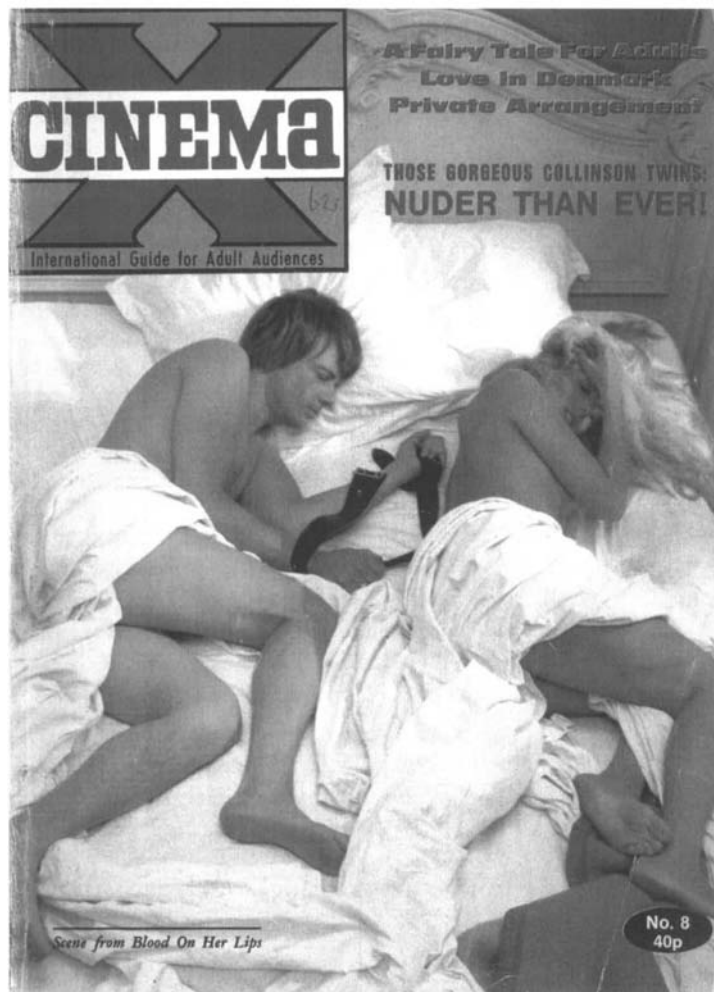
In contrast to US reception, however, these arguments seem less the result of efforts to construct a coherent critical position than to reflect the preferences and politics of the newspapers and magazines in which they appear. It is by no means accidental that conservative publications (*Ecran*, *Lettres françaises*) tend to dislike the film for its exploitation, while the leftwing *Le Combat*, *Le monde* and *Positif* are inclined to read this as less problematic, even to the degree where they will champion aesthetically low-value films *because* they challenge taste.[68] So, instead of being a comment on the 'trashiness' of the film's presentation, the emphasis on the dual tone in French reviews rather represents their politically inspired desire to focus on and condemn or condone exploitative elements regardless of the degree of 'trashiness' actually present in the film: less a comment on the film than a defence of editorial positions.

68 See, for instance, the excellent overviews of editorial policies in French film reviewing in Daniel Sauvaget, Jacques Zimmer and Claude Gauteur, 'Le cinema et la presse (x): les revues cinéphiles', *Image et son/Revue du cinema*, no. 354 (October 1980), pp. 97–116; Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, 'Le cinema et la presse (vii): les revues du cinéma érotique', *Image et son/Revue du cinema*, no. 348 (March 1980) pp. 88–96.

In general, though, European reception confirms the belief that *Daughters of Darkness* is a trash film, if not in content and style then at least in its politics and its presentation by the producers and sales companies. The proximity of different reception contexts guarantees that most local distributors and reviewers dealing with the film were very much aware of what emphases were being placed elsewhere. This led them to considerations of the overall unevenness of the film. The different titles and screenwriters, and the differences in stylistic appreciation and politics, are signs of that unevenness, leading to the 'trash' labeling. It is not difficult to perceive a film as trash if there is so much confusion about its nature.

Reception by comparison: the Low Countries

Daughters of Darkness was released in the Low Countries between February and April 1972.[69] Generally, its release and reception follows the trajectory set out by its US reception. The film was marketed as both an auteurist exploration of artistic themes and a cash-in on contemporary exploitation fashions. The publicity poster was the same as in the USA, prominently featuring Seyrig and Ouimet (suggesting both artistic seriousness and exploitative lesbianism), and the press kit emphasized both the horrific origins of the story and the literary qualities of Kümel's adaptation. In comparison with the rest of the world however, the film was much better publicized, much more visible among other releases. This is not surprising: a local film naturally gets more attention. But the fact that the release was long anticipated also seems to explain some of the interest.[70] And this higher visibility also stemmed from the connections made by local distributors between *Daughters of Darkness* and two other films, up for release around the same time.

The Dutch release of *Daughters of Darkness* coincided with that of another film by producers Collet and Drouot, *Louisa, een woord van liefde/Louisa, a Word of Love* (1972). Not only produced, but also directed by Collet and Drouot, *Louisa* was their first attempt at breaking out of the boundaries of the exploitation film market, addressing a crossover audience with a tale of a triangular relationship between one woman and two men, set against the backdrop of World War I. A significant number of Dutch reviewers took up the suggested connection between the two films. Some even mention a 'wave' of Belgian cinema. Most, however, ponder on why it took the local distributors so long to release *Daughters of Darkness*, and why it was not accompanied by a major publicity campaign. Both *Vrij Nederland* and *Elsevier*, leading magazines in The Netherlands, devote at least a paragraph to this peculiarity, before commenting on the film itself.[71] The connection with *Louisa* did not, however, prevent Dutch reviewers from addressing the exploitative elements of *Daughters of Darkness*. Like most reviewers they describe the film as an uneven mix of 'cheap' shock elements and

69 Given the Low Countries' cultural attitudes towards horror films (and genre films in general) and commercial cinemas, it is not so extraordinary that they released the film later than other territories. See Mathijs, 'Daughters of Darkness', pp. 96–106.

70 As Francis Bolen explains in his newsletter, after the film was released in the USA, Canada, the UK, France and Germany, 'A Bruxelles, on attend toujours', referring to the fact that anticipation and expectation about the film (and its overseas success) were building up. See: *Francis Bolen's Newsletter*, no. 224 (January 1972).

71 See Wim Verstappen, 'Kümels vampieren zonder stromend water', *Vrij Nederland*, 6 May 1972; Anton Haakman, 'Hoorspel met lichtbeelden', *Elsevier*, 13 May 1972, pp. 107–8.

72 Marje Roscam Abbing, 'Subtiel walgen bij Kümmel (sic)', *NRC Handelsblad*, 28 April 1972; C.B. Doolaard, 'Stijlvolle vampiers', *Het Parool*, 28 April 1972; Frank Zaagsma, '''n schoonheid van een film over een vampier-verhaal', *De Volkskrant*, 28 April 1972; Verstappen, 'Kümels vampieren zonder stromend water'; Haakman, 'Hoorspel met lichtbeelden', pp. 107–8.

73 Abbing, 'Subtiel walgen bij Kümmel'.

74 See, for instance, 'Harry Kümel nous parle de *Malpertuis*', *Le Soir*, 13 January 1972.

75 See, for instance, 'Les Lèvres Rouges', *Elles*, 20 March 1972; P.I., 'Les Lèvres rouges', *Amis du Film*, no. 231 (April 1972), p. 29.

76 See Mosley, *Split Screen*, pp. 106–26; Sojcher, *La kermesse heroique du cinema belge*, pp. 338–9.

77 The quote is from Daniel Van Avermaet, 'Les Lèvres Rouges', *Film & Televisie*, no. 179 (April 1972), p. 23. Other Belgian reviews include: Pierre Thonon, 'J'ai pensé à Marlene', *Pourquoi Pas?*, 17 February 1972; 'Les Lèvres Rouges', *La Libre Belgique*, 17 February 1972; Maggy Thonon and Pierre Thonon, 'Un bon slogan: Les Lèvres Rouges', *Echo de la Bourse*, 17 February 1972; 'Une vamp au sens vampire', *Cinéculture*, 17 February 1972); 'Met jouw bloed op mijn lippen', *Rode Vaan*, 17 Februari 1972; Synchro, 'Les Lèvres Rouges', *Le Soir*, 17 February 1972; Hilde Van Gaelen, 'Les Lèvres Rouges', *Gazet Van Antwerpen*, 17 February 1972; 'Lesbische vampieren', *De Standaard*, 18 February 1972; Dirk Lauwaert, 'Ook over Les Lèvres Rouges', *Kunst & Cultuur*, 2 March 1972; Jos Burvenich, 'Harry Kümel maakte film voor de camera', *Spectator*, 4 March 1972; P.I., 'Les Lèvres rouges', p. 29; B.O., 'Harry Kümels Griezelfilm', *Spectator*, 22 April 1972.

artistic pretensions. But unlike most other reviewers, Dutch critics seem to appreciate this mix, rather than condemn it.[72] For one thing, they agree that in most respects, *Daughters of Darkness* is far superior to both *Louisa* and *Monsieur Hawarden*, or at least more honest in its intentions. The comparisons with *Louisa* and *Monsieur Hawarden* are symptomatic of a strategy of extensive referencing by Dutch critics. They also make positive references to the paintings of Paul Delvaux, the films of Roman Polanski, Claude Chabrol and Roger Corman, and legendary movie stars Louise Brooks (compared to Rau) and Marlene Dietrich (compared to Seyrig). In addition, *The NRC Handelsblad* devotes an entire paragraph to Howard Thompson's often-quoted *New York Times* review and mentions the German sex-related release.[73] Influenced, perhaps, by the connection with *Louisa*, the one country offering an undivided positive reception to *Daughters of Darkness* actually does so, then, through a strategy of comparison rather than an appreciation of the film on its own merits.

In the Belgian reception of *Daughters of Darkness* this comparative strategy becomes even more important, especially since there was no concerted marketing plan in Belgium to speak of, and no efforts were made to publicize the film (a few isolated attempts by local exhibitors notwithstanding). The Belgian release coincided with a flow of news concerning the release of Kümel's next film, *Malpertuis* (at least its French- and English-language versions – the Dutch language version was not released until 1973).[74] Although this had no profound influence on how the film was generally evaluated, it was part of a stream of local references, often employed to discuss *Daughters of Darkness* and its place within Belgian (film) culture.[75] Apart from distributors and journalists, opinion-makers and politicians seized the opportunity to suggest a 'new wave' of Belgian cinema, of which *Daughters of Darkness* was supposedly a symptom.[76] Unlike in the Netherlands, however, this did not lead to an unequivocally positive critical reception. There is no lack of referencing with a positive connotation: Murnau, Dreyer, Von Sternberg, Polanski, Garbo, Brooks, Dietrich, *Last Year in Marienbad*, and numerous others are mentioned in passing. Still, the Belgian reception rather confirmed the international one: *Daughters of Darkness* was regarded as an uneven film, with some distinctive qualities, but also lacking vision and 'cinematographical flair'.[77] In almost every case, the unevenness is attributed to the film's dual intentions of being both artistically challenging and commercially formulaic. As with the international reception, attempts are made to read the film as 'irony' and '*grand guignol*'. And as with the international reception, most critics end up deciding that the film's trashiness is the result of its inability to present itself straightforwardly.

However, this conclusion is reached via a different critical route: by comparison with other Belgian films and filmmakers of the time. First of

all, the near-release of *Malpertuis* and the frequent mentioning of *Monsieur Hawarden* made it easier for critics to develop an argument about Kümel rather than *Daughters of Darkness*. Although this led them to appreciate Kümel's talents (often described as 'the most talented Belgian director' – see *Echo de la Bourse*), the difference between these two films and *Daughters of Darkness* in terms of the explicit portrayal of sex and violence also prevented them from claiming the film as 'good'. More important than this small-scale comparison is the wider framework of Belgian cinema in which *Daughters of Darkness* is set. Apart from a few rare examples, every review places the film in relation to, or against, Belgian art-house films, like *Franz* (Jacques Brel, 1971), *Mira* (Fons Rademakers, 1971), *Les gommes* (Lucien Deroisy and René Micha, 1968) and *Rendez-vous à Bray* (André Delvaux, 1971). When discussing *Mira*, which was after all directed by Rademakers, who plays the part of 'mother' in *Daughters of Darkness*, and which also contains scenes of violence and nudity, it is made clear that *Daughters of Darkness*'s lack of realism (*Mira* is set in a rural town and has more panoramic outdoor shots) devalues the film as art. As a result, Belgian reception acknowledges *Daughters of Darkness*'s place in an interesting *oeuvre* by a talented filmmaker and in a booming film culture (and it even accepts the film's artistic credentials), but also denounces the film as an artistic failure *within* that context, mostly because it is seen as too exploitative. In such a context, *Daughters of Darkness* could only become art-trash.

There are several elements that set the Low Countries' reception of *Daughters of Darkness* apart from its international reception. It seems only natural that much more attention is paid to local circumstances of production and distribution, but the reviews also give the impression that beyond discussing a single film they are using *Daughters of Darkness* as a tool to address the contemporary situation of Lowlands (or Belgian) cinema as a whole. It is also striking to note how much attention is paid to the film's international reception. Many critics mention the international trajectory of the film, and some acknowledge its commercial success in the USA. Though this might seem natural, given that the film was released elsewhere first, it does also seem odd, if only because it is hardly common for critics to refer to other territories when they discuss a film from their own country. Moreover, the kind of attention accorded to the international reception seems to function in the process of evaluation, as if critics were using it to mark how un-Belgian *Daughters of Darkness* is, and thus to explain some of their other judgements. For instance, reference to the film's US reception provided reviewers with an argument for appreciating the film as a 'commercial machine' or an exploitation movie, something which (as I have explained above) was not part of the framework of Lowland film criticism at that time. For Belgian critics, then, in line with their discussions of the film as part of contemporary local cinema, *Daughters of Darkness*'s trashiness may

well have functioned as a way of breaking open, or at least critically addressing, that framework, making it even more *maudit*.

Chronology, extrinsic references, and long term reception

The Low Countries' reception of *Daughters of Darkness* shows the extent to which the territories in which the film was released after it had already been shown in other parts of the world referenced prior releases. This is a fact that is rarely acknowledged in reception studies. In most cases, these studies assume that local receptions exist in isolation, or that they do not let themselves be influenced (or even regulated) by frames of reference set up elsewhere. Yet it seems logical for distributors and local marketers to build upon prior praise, and to prevent previous mistakes. The use of the *New York Times* quotes in publicizing the film is a simple but significant example of this. As the above analysis shows, however, knowledge of what happened elsewhere is not the only factor in regulating receptions, nor does it necessarily prevent the same kinds of problematic reception occurring again: *Daughters of Darkness* was received as trash throughout the entire world for different reasons. Similarly, reception studies should not ignore the importance of prior frameworks existing *within* local settings. Again, the Low Countries' reception of *Daughters of Darkness* (and the French reception for that matter) shows how important local frameworks are, even if they are sometimes also coincidental. It also seems that acknowledgement of these chronological elements, worldwide and local, is a recurrent point of attention within specific receptions. They are used to build arguments concerning a film's meaning.

I propose to call the acknowledgment of previous receptions and already existing frames of reference in particular local circumstances *extrinsic references*. Extrinsic references do not (necessarily) relate to the film itself. In Bordwellian terms, they are the opposite of 'cues' (elements of the text used by critics as tools in their rhetorical construction of arguments about a film):[78] they are instead, and much in line with how they are used in publicity campaigns, 'quotes'. For Bordwell, such elements of 'extrinsic evidence' are at best subordinate; they only function as support for the interpretation. I would rather argue that this depends on a film's reception chronology – its trajectory through time. The longer a film's reception chronology becomes, or the longer its public visibility lasts (even if only in small fan communities), the more important extrinsic references, or 'quotes', become in determining the meaning of a film and its reputation.[79]

For the remainder of this essay, I will analyze extrinsic references in the long-term reception of *Daughters of Darkness*. For reasons of brevity, I will focus on the use of the extrinsic references in constructing *Daughters of Darkness* as a cult film, on the one hand, and in the attempt to give the film a culturally relevant reputation on the other.[80]

78 See: David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 13.

79 Studies of long-term reception, such as fan studies, have been pointing this out for some time. For an example of such a study in relation to trash cinema, see the discussions of the 'trashiness' of Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls* (1995), in which positions on the film's text are juxtaposed by claims on the use of the film by audiences. See: I.Q. Hunter, 'Beaver Las Vegas! A fan-boy's defence of *Showgirls*', in Mendik and Harper (eds). *Unruly Pleasures*, pp. 189–201; Akira Mizuta Lippit, Noel Burch, Chon Noriega, Ara Osterweil, Linda Williams, Eric Schaefer, Jeffrey Sconce, 'Round table: Showgirls', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3 (2003), pp. 32–46.

80 Evidently there can be quite a discussion about the degree to which references can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic. The genre references to vampire films by Dreyer, Murnau, Polanski, Corman or Vadim, for instance, can be seen as both intrinsic (*Daughters of Darkness* is a vampire film) or extrinsic (*Daughters of Darkness* is a different kind of vampire film). The same goes for star-related references: references to Marlene Dietrich may be considered extrinsic (the comtesse looks like Dietrich in this film) or intrinsic (Seyrig always looks like Dietrich).

Cult and cultural relevance

The construction of *Daughters of Darknes* as a cult film draws on already well-established references, such as the tales about production circumstances, including the different titles and different language versions, and the film's mixed receptions. If there is one common denominator here, it is confusion and scarcity. After the initial introduction of *Daughters of Darkness* in territories across the world, the film disappears from everyone's agenda, something that was already predicted in the *Variety* review ('going to be lost in the mire of the conventionally bloody exploitation market'). This situation of scarcity continues until the present day. British video distributor Tartan issued a video release in 1993 but copies are no longer available and rights have not been renewed. Similarly, attempts to release *Daughters of Darkness* on DVD have mostly failed.[81] On top of that, most companies that did try to re-release the film on video or DVD only used a cut copy of the film (in the English language), and generally made a mess of the film credits, even up to the point of misspelling Kümel's name, getting the year of release, the title, or the screenplay credits wrong, or identifying the film as French.

This situation has two major implications for the reputation of *Daughters of Darkness*. First, the confusion and unavailability add to the film's reputation as an uneven trashy film: nothing about the film seems straightforward, and the lack of availability makes it difficult to separate textual truth from contextual myth. For instance, this made it virtually impossible to verify Kümel's longstanding complaint about the unevenness of the film in an interview he gave in 1975 (Kümel complains, for example, that a final scene, in which it is suggested that the spirit of Seyrig's character has moved to another person, was cut from the Dutch release).[82] Such confusion fuels the film's reputation as a cult film (which is how it is usually advertised). Second, the general unavailability of *Daughters of Darkness* has led film museums, non-profit organizations, and film festivals to stage new screenings of the film as a 'rediscovery', a film unfairly forgotten. This sets the film up for a new kind of reception career, focused less on commercial gain and more on the film's place within specific critical and cultural networks and frameworks. When the Antwerp arthouse cinema Cine Monty (connected to the alternative film magazine *Andere Sinema*) set up screenings of the film, it catalogued it as 'cult', putting it in a 'Midnight Special' screening session. Other examples are screenings at the Cine Club de Poche (Brussels), the Belgian Film Museum, the New York Museum of Modern Art and the National Film Theatre in London. The programme notes of these screenings show striking resemblances to how *Daughters of Darkness* was received nearly a decade earlier (including references to 'irony' to explain the unevenness between artistic intentions and exploitative features).[83] But the notes also show a dramatic increase in extrinsic references. Most of these refer to the film's initial success, but

81 When I interviewed Harry Kümel he stated he was still embroiled in legal battles over the film's ownership. These battles have prevented further dissemination of the film. Author's interview with Harry Kümel, 20 July 2003.

82 Van De Westelaken, 'Interview met Harry Kümel', pp. 29–41.

83 See programme notes of these screenings as found in the press folder of *Daughters of Darkness* held by the Belgian Royal Film Archive.

84 Belgian Film Museum programme
notes.

85 Macker, 'Daughters ravaged'.

86 Krista Turner, 'Reviewer
criticized', Campus Digest –
University of Missouri, Columbia,
12 November 1977, found in the
Royal Film Archive.

87 Soren, Unreal Reality, p. 33.

88 Ibid., p. 35.

89 Ibid., p. 33.

90 Ibid., pp. 35–6.

also to its troubled initial reception. Some even attempt to connect extrinsic references to intrinsic considerations, by stating that the film 'is formally a horror film, but has become a challenge to that label'.[84] In addition, the screening of the film by renowned institutions also implies that the film has, since its initial release, gained in significance, an implication supported by the fact that, from the late 1980s on, and through the early 1990s, Daughters of Darkness became a regularly screened film at Gay and Lesbian film festivals.

The film's inclusion in a cultural niche connects well with the second frame of reference I would like to address, namely the increase in extrinsic references to Daughters of Darkness's cultural relevance. When the film disappeared after its initial release and reception it had been given many labels but it hadn't been called culturally relevant. This label only gradually surfaced. It was first referred to by David Soren, of the University of Missouri, Columbia. In 1977, Campus Digest, the university's campus newspaper, published a review of the film (probably after a screening by Soren), in which the film was negatively evaluated.[85] This led to a fierce reaction in which it was claimed that Daughters of Darkness was a 'masterpiece'. According to the writer of this letter, the reviewer 'has little, if any, idea at all of what a "masterpiece" should be'.[86] The letter further refers to Soren's lectures about the film in explaining why it is a masterpiece. However anecdotal this short claim may seem, it is significant because it points to the importance of extrinsic references. For the writer of the letter, Daughters of Darkness is not a good film in itself, it is a good film because it has been shown to be a good film. In the first English book publication on Kümel, by Soren, the use of extrinsic references to explain the film's value takes a strange turn: he uses extrinsic references to the film's reception to show how it is a good film. Soren spends much time detailing the reception history of Daughters of Darkness after trying to establish that the film is 'more than a stylistic exercise or a chic horror nudie as critics believed'.[87] For Soren, the mixed reception exemplifies the 'ambiguity' of the film, and its openness for 'many interpretations'.[88] So, Soren turns the usual interpretation of Daughters of Darkness upside down: it is exactly the mixed reception that shows how the film is 'filled with subtle and playful intellectuality and bristles with artistry and an atmosphere of dread', and if this mixed reception is the result of the film's unevenness, then that unevenness is a quality rather than an obstacle in its appreciation.[89] Moreover, Soren embeds many of his other references in extrinsic contexts, ranging from Psycho's shower scene, of which he says that 'audiences often comment [upon it] as a homage', to Rocky, which he extracts from an interview with Kümel (in which he uses it as a negative comparison).[90]

This move from text to context in showing why Daughters of Darkness matters is symptomatic for its reception history as a culturally significant film from the 1980s onwards. A straightforward example is Bonnie Zimmerman's analysis of the film in an issue of Jump Cut devoted to

91 Zimmerman, 'Lesbian vampires', p. 24.

92 Ibid., p. 23.

93 See Carol Jenks, 'Daughters of Darkness: a lesbian vampire art film', in Andy Black (ed.), Necronomicon: Book One (London: Creation Books, 1996), pp. 22–34. Even the one-page review of Daughters of Darkness in a pocket guide to vampire films mentions this. Colin Odell and Michelle LeBlanc, Vampire Films (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2000), p. 33.

94 Danny Peary, Cult Movies (New York, NY: Delta Books, 1983), pp. 56–7.

95 For instance, Jan-Pieter Everaerts still manages to avoid mentioning the film in his popular book on Belgian cinema. Jan-Pieter Everaerts, Film in Belgie: een permanente revolte (Brussels: Mediadoc, 2000).

96 In 2002 both the Lincoln Film Center in New York (as part of a large retrospective of Belgian cinema), and the National Film Theatre in London staged screenings of Kümel's films, including Daughters of Darkness. See David Thompson, 'Auteur of darkness', Sight and Sound, vol. 12, no. 8 (2002), pp. 16–18.

lesbian cinema. Like Soren, Zimmerman connects her interpretation of the film (Daughters of Darkness is a film showing how 'the lesbian vampire theme can be revised and reinterpreted, thus opening it to use by feminists'),[91] to contextual situations and extrinsic references. She too focuses on reception: she notes how the screening she attended consisted of 'aficionados of soft-porn, followers of the new wave ... and a large contingent of lesbians curious about the film's advertised display of lesbianism'.[92] This leads her to consider the film as a 'feminist film'. The assumption made here is that the film deserves 'reinterpretation' because of the contexts under which it has been received, turning it in fact into another kind of movie. It is interesting to note that the film's trashiness and unevenness again become qualities in Zimmerman's interpretations. She refers to the unevenness as facilitating new meaning: the 'ambiguity' of the film opens it to new interpretations. Since Zimmerman's article there have been numerous attempts to attribute a cultural significance to Daughters of Darkness. The inclusion of the film in gay and lesbian film festivals and frequent interpretations of the film along feminist/psychoanalytic lines have certainly added to that.[93] Their use of extrinsic references has also affected the film's value. Its status has become more and more complex, including not just dismissals on the grounds of exploitative or aesthetic considerations, but also appraisals for its treatment of gender issues. The entire attempt to reinterpret the film using extrinsic references is perhaps best summarized by Danny Peary, who writes that:

> It is a flawed film to be sure, but of all the horror films that have strived for high camp only [few] have so masterfully combined traditional horror elements with outrageous, often ludicrous wit.... Moreover, it is that rare horror film with social relevance: it more than expressed feminist themes.[94]

In this short paragraph Peary succeeds in linking several apparently contradicting characteristics of Daughters of Darkness together: imbuing aesthetic flaws and commercial aims with cultural relevance. Importantly, and like critics a decade earlier, Peary does this by using the notion of camp as a binding tool. Peary's review also shows how the film's unevenness, now frequently dubbed 'ambiguity', has been turned into an asset. While still being trash, Daughters of Darkness has also become valuable.

In the end, the two frames of references discussed above, and many others, demonstrate how crucial extrinsic references are in the long-term reception of Daughters of Darkness. They also show that the trashiness of the film has been less an obstacle and more a quality in determining how it is interpreted. The reception history of Daughters of Darkness is still not finished; there is still no consensus over its meaning. The film is still regarded as a strange case by many,[95] it is still being unearthed, together with Kümel himself, as a 'lost classic',[96] and small-scale communities are still affecting its status by using it in their own

97 An interesting related reception trajectory is that of the film (or sometimes just its title) within vampire fan communities. See http://www1.minn.net/~pkeesey/ or http://www.angelfire.com/il/blackbats/DOD1.html. It again shows how important extrinsic references have become in making sense of *Daughters of Darkness*.

98 Jeffrey Sconce, 'Trashing the academy: taste, excess and an emerging politics of cinematic style', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 371–93.

99 Joan Hawkins, 'Sleaze mania, euro-trash and high art: the place of European art films in American low culture', in *Cutting Edge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

discourses, each with a different significance.[97] In each case however, extrinsic references, or 'quotes', play an increasingly important role.

The shifts in the reception trajectory of *Daughters of Darkness* parallel a significant shift in film studies. Since the release of *Daughters of Darkness* and similar fare throughout the early 1970s, 'trash' has become a very different word in cinema studies. If it first referred to straightforward rubbish, it now carries a much more subtle and complex status. When, in a recent discussion of Kümel's work in *Sight & Sound*, *Daughters of Darkness* is introduced as 'commercial trash', the word is used in a far less negative way. It has come to signify a particular kind of film, characterized by its openness to different interpretations, much more than just a bad film. The change parallels a change in film discourse, in which issues of aesthetic quality have become less absolutist, more dominated by what Jeffrey Sconce has called paracinematic taste.[98] With regard to uneven films such as *Daughters of Darkness*, which have both aesthetic and commercial potential, the usage of the word 'trash' has become even more complicated. This complexity is perhaps best explained by Joan Hawkins, in her discussion of the link between European art films (and discourses) and American 'low culture' tastes and receptions, when she describes the confusion created by applying the same reception rhetorics to the films of, say, Jess Franco and Georges Franju.[99] In doing so, Hawkins points out just how crucial reception is in trying to determine trash. Given the reception trajectory of *Daughters of Darkness*, it should come as no surprise that the film is a prime example in Hawkins's argument.

But in trying to understand the use and meaning of 'trash', many aspects of film reception are still being overlooked. My discussion of the reception trajectory of *Daughters of Darkness* demonstrates how discussions of trash and trashiness are dominated by the careful rhetorical use of extrinsic references. These elements of a film's context often regulate its self-presentation, marketing and reception, from creating expectations and confusion at the moment of its release, through revisions of already established interpretations. Extrinsic references also point to different interpretive communities. Distributors and critics all over the world have made both neatly matching and extremely different interpretations of *Daughters of Darkness*. In every case, their interpretations have been guided by local conditions and concerns. As the reception trajectory of *Daughters of Darkness* shows, ancillary materials and rhetorical strategies play an important role in this. Moreover, extrinsic references, local concerns, and ancillary discourses put emphasis not on what a film is, ontologically (or for always and everywhere), but on how it is being used by audiences, critics and specific communities. They imply that a film means within specific frames of reference of time and place. If we want to understand

what 'trash cinema' is, then, it is best to look at its reception trajectory, allowing it to work as a dialogue, not so much between various moments of marketing and reception, but as traffic ('talk' if you want) in international cultural politics and changing historical frames.

Documenting the trauma of apartheid: *Long Night's Journey into Day* and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

ASHLEY DAWSON

On 21 March 2003, retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu officially ended the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by handing over the body's final report to President Thabo Mbeki. This date, the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre when South African police fired into a crowd of peaceful protesters, was a particularly resonant one for the TRC to conclude its seven-year investigation into human rights violations committed during the era of strict racial segregation known as apartheid. Established in a last-minute codicil to the interim constitution that was drafted as part of the multi-party negotiations preceding South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, the TRC heard the testimony of more than 21,000 victims of apartheid-era violence and their relatives in a series of emotionally charged public hearings. In addition to recording the harrowing words of these witnesses to atrocity, commissioners also examined amnesty applications from perpetrators of human rights violations and sought, more broadly, to promote reconciliation between the races in the new, democratic South Africa. While other institutional innovations such as the final drafting of a new constitution may prove to have a more dramatic impact on South Africa's future, the TRC's hearings were among the most gripping public events of the post-apartheid era.[1] After decades in which a racist regime systematically silenced and brutalized them, victims of violence and their relatives

1 Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, 'Introduction', in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: the Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

2 Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Orality, memory, and social history in South Africa', in Nuttall and Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past*, p. 99.

3 For an analogous argument concerning the role of representations of the TRC as 'elegy', see Ingrid de Kok, 'Cracked heirlooms: memory on exhibition', in Nuttall and Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past*, p. 61.

4 Priscilla Hayner, 'Same species, different animal: how South Africa compares to truth commissions worldwide', in Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd (eds), *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000), p. 34.

5 'Paying for the past', *The Economist*, 15 April 2003.

appeared before the TRC to express their grief and rage. As a result of this process, the stories of ordinary people under apartheid were officially recognized and recorded by the new state. The TRC has, as a result, been widely perceived as drafting the first inclusive public history for a democratic South Africa.[2] Not surprisingly, the broad public dissemination of the TRC proceedings by television and film raises particularly thorny aesthetic and political questions. One such representation, the documentary film *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, provides the focal point for this essay. It forces us to question the extent to which representations of the TRC can capture the tremendous emotional and at times cathartic power of the hearings, while refusing easy closure of the stories of violation and loss presented during testimony.[3]

Because of its unprecedented focus on the testimonies of ordinary people who were victimized by apartheid, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has become an exemplary organ of transitional justice for democratizing governments in regions such as Latin America and Eastern Europe.[4] Yet despite this international success, the TRC met with strong criticism and even outright antagonism from many in South Africa. The controversy over reparations for apartheid abuses is indicative of the reasons for such hostility. In its final report, the TRC recommended the creation of a three-billion-rand (approximately £260 million) compensation fund for the era's victims. This fund was to be financed in part by a 'wealth tax' on businesses that profited from apartheid while operating in South Africa. In his formal response to the final report on 15 April 2003, however, President Mbeki announced that the government would not introduce the wealth tax, proposing $4000 in state-funded compensation for each of the 21,000 or so victims rather than the $19,000 or so envisaged by the members of the TRC.[5] After waiting for years to receive compensation for injustices suffered during the apartheid era and, in addition, seeing some of the perpetrators of such violence granted amnesty in the interim, victims had grounds for anger at being offered such meagre reparation by the government. The inadequacy of the proposed compensation suggested that the suffering of apartheid-era victims was being subordinated on both a material and a symbolic level to the harsh necessities of post-apartheid nation building. The TRC, in other words, does not simply recognize popular suffering during the apartheid era, but also confers legitimacy on a once discredited state and the bureaucratic elite who now control it, by folding the sacrifices of the people into the narrative of the new nation. In spite of the popularity of Tutu's appeals for reconciliation, such self-sacrifice in the name of nation building is a bitter pill to swallow for those whose lives have been blighted by apartheid.

The 140 or so hearings of the TRC at which victims testified were held in different venues around South Africa in order to give members of the public the greatest possible access. The sessions were also broadcast daily by South African radio and television stations. Media coverage of

the hearings tended to follow the same script as is apparent in the government's stance on reparations: individual suffering should be sublimated for the sake of national reconciliation.[6] Perhaps as a result of the TRC's broad exposure, a majority of South Africans felt that the hearings contributed positively to their new nation.[7] Obviously, the hearings were preferable to the blanket amnesty originally called for by the National Party (NP), the architects and executors of apartheid. In addition, the TRC seemed to encapsulate the nation's miraculously peaceful transition to democracy and the common desire of South Africans to create a new society from the ashes of apartheid. Yet the TRC's emphasis on reconciliation imposed a narrative of healing and nation building that threatened to promote a kind of amnesia among South Africans. Not only did the model of 'restorative justice' promoted by TRC spokespeople such as Tutu displace victims' demands for retribution, but broader crimes of the apartheid era such as forced removals and relocations were suppressed from the narrative of national suffering. The TRC thus narrowed the scope of historical memory to the acts of freedom fighters and regime assassins alone, eliding the suffering of average South Africans caught up in the quotidian forms of state and civilian injustice that characterized apartheid.

Given the complicity of the media in the promotion of this detachment from the past, a central question now that the TRC has completed its work is whether representations of the hearings can preserve an ethical space for the voices of those oppressed by apartheid. If apartheid has had an enduring impact on victims of human rights violations specifically, and on South Africans in general, aesthetic representations of the TRC need to resist a facile conciliatory narrative that would elide such abuses. How, for example, can filmic accounts of the TRC avoid focusing simply on the spectacle of violent incidents on which the commission's hearings concentrated, thereby marginalizing the long-term effects of violent trauma?[8] Can aesthetic work on the TRC challenge the media's chronically short attention span and its tendency to present sentimental stories with hopeful endings? And, finally, to what extent can representations of the TRC capture the mixed desires for purgation of, and retribution for, the past that animated many South Africans during the early years of democracy?

Made by Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann of the USA, the documentary *Long Night's Journey Into Day: South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation* (2000) is the most ambitious effort yet to record and disseminate the many aspects of the TRC's investigations to a broad international audience.[9] Reid and Hoffmann's film probes the relation of subaltern voices to the process of nation building by focusing primarily on the words of those who testified before the TRC. The film thus departs from conventional documentary practice in which interviewee testimony is subordinated to an expository discourse sustained through means such as the commentary of a disembodied narrator. Challenging the metanarrative of reconciliation, *Long Night's Journey Into Day*

6 For a critique of the analogous equation of popular anti-apartheid resistance with elite leadership in Video News Service's documentary history of the African National Congress, see Jacqueline Maingard, 'Television broadcasting in a democratic South Africa', *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997), pp. 260–74.

7 According to *Africa News*: 'Most black South Africans surveyed in 1998 believed that the TRC had been fair, as did a slim majority of English-speaking whites. White Afrikaners did not.' 'South Africa: the bringing of truth', *Africa News*, 21 March 2003.

8 For a discussion of the media's structural inability to represent the long-term effects of violent trauma, see Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, 'Introduction', in Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Margaret Lock, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (eds), *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 25–6.

9 *Long Night's Journey Into Day: South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation* (Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann, USA, Iris Films, 2000).

foregrounds the fragmentary and elliptical narratives of the victims of apartheid. This focus on witness testimony highlights the tensions within the putatively reconciliatory space of the TRC hearings. The film achieves this end by using a variety of dialectical representational strategies. For example, through the juxtaposition of victims' and perpetrators' voices, Long Night's Journey Into Day demonstrates the contested nature of both truth and reconciliation in the new South Africa. While the film subscribes somewhat to the ideology of healing articulated so powerfully by Tutu, its strategy of weaving together individuals' testimonies during TRC hearings with interviews conducted elsewhere reveals the structural social inequalities and racial animus that catalyzed apartheid-era abuses. In this way the film works against the spectacular images of violence disseminated by mainstream media coverage. Finally, by documenting the tearful silences, cries of agony and sheer physical presence of witnesses both before the TRC and in the townships and suburbs where they live, Long Night's Journey Into Day helps contest the seamless absorption of such witnessing into nation-building narratives.

Documentary form and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Documentary filmmaking has recently taken a turn towards greater self-reflexivity. Seeking to make sense of this shift in representing 'the real', Bill Nichols's typology of documentary filmmaking identifies the following discrete modes: the *expository*, which is typified by its use of authoritative voiceover; the *observational*, also known as direct cinema or cinema verite; the *interactive*, in which filmmakers engage in dialogue with interviewees; the *reflexive*, in which the act of filmmaking itself becomes the subject of documentation; and the *performative*, in which the filmmaker becomes a performer in his or her own film.[10] For Nichols, the first two modes are problematic since they perpetuate the illusion of an 'objective' and wholly authentic representation of reality. Consequently, the recent trend towards highly reflexive and performative documentary practice by filmmakers such as Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield is seen by Nichols as a welcome development. This turn towards reflexivity has also been apparent in South African documentary work, where the end of apartheid has provided filmmakers with the opportunity to engage in more personal forms of representation than was generally the practice during the years of highly committed anti-apartheid aesthetics in the 1980s.[11] This trend in documentary filmmaking may be seen as part of a broader move away from the agitprop realism of the apartheid era. Increasingly, self-reflexive forms of representation are coming to dominate post-apartheid South African aesthetics.[12] Underlying this shift is a reexamination of claims to truth in representation, an issue highlighted not simply by current aesthetic practice but by broader social discourses around nation building of which the TRC is exemplary.

10 Summarized in John Izod and Richard Kilborn, 'The documentary', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *World Cinema: Critical Approaches* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 45–8.

11 For an overview of recent documentary work in South Africa, consult the website of the South African International Documentary Film Festival at http://www.bigworld.co.za/encounters.

12 The turn towards autobiographical narratives in writing is discussed in Sarah Nuttall, 'Telling "free" stories? Memory and democracy in South African autobiography since 1994', in Nuttall and Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past*, pp. 75–88.

13 For a summary of these debates, see Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 145–8.

14 See, for example, John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987).

15 Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

Although there is much to be gained from questioning the transparency of representation, Nichols's rather inflexible typology tends to impose an avant-gardist teleology on documentary practice. There are a number of significant problems with this approach. First of all, films that are not formally experimental or self-reflexive are regarded as under-evolved and politically suspect in a replay of the debates concerning the ideological role of film that took place in film studies during the late 1970s.[13] In a South African context, this tends not only to discredit the *engagé* cinema of the apartheid era but also many films made by emerging black filmmakers today. Rather than employing the deconstructive style of much experimental cinema from the developed world, young South African directors tend to draw on the aesthetics of film genres popular in the townships, including Hong Kong kung fu films, Mexican *telenovelas*, and Nigerian videos. South African filmmakers' adaptations of popular film forms from other locations in the global South need to be seen as creative appropriations of globalized media rather than simply as a form of empty mimicry that fails to meet Euro-American avant-gardist standards. This trend, in other words, works in tandem with the turn to self-reflexivity rather than militating against it. Nichols's typology, which is founded on a naive, formalist assessment of audience response, encourages (predominantly white) critics versed in the history of the international avant garde to pontificate about the lack of a critical South African filmmaking style in a highly condescending manner. According to this formalist ethos, realist films encourage passive consumption among audiences, whereas pastiche cinema creates critical thought. This model ignores accounts of the complexity of audience reception that have become standard fare in cultural studies.[14] Moreover, the assumptions that underlie Nichols's argument about audience reception seem particularly problematic in a South African milieu, where the majority of the public had a highly sceptical view of state representations of events in realist formats such as television news. Finally, Nichols's emphasis on highly reflexive modes of filmmaking may cause critics to understate, if not ignore, the complexity of codes in putatively traditional observationalist modes of documentary work.[15]

Long Night's Journey into Day demonstrates the elisions in a tightly compartmentalized typology of documentary films. Reid and Hoffmann's film almost completely eschews the expository mode, allowing interviewees to speak with relatively little apparent mediation. Yet its predominant use of an observational style does not suggest, following Nichols's schema, a naive mode of representation that claims to present the unvarnished truth. Given the multiple definitions of truth in circulation during the TRC's hearings and the political stakes at play behind such definitions, such a naive stance would be untenable. Thus, the stylistic approach of *Long Night's Journey into Day* is influenced not simply by the truth-telling codes that condition the audience's consumption of documentaries, but also by the moral imperatives of the

16 John Corner, *The Art of Record: a
    Critical Introduction to
    Documentary* (New York, NY:
    Manchester University Press,
    1996).

17 See Sergei Eisenstein, 'A
    dialectical approach to film form',
    in Sergei Eisenstein and Jay Leda
    (eds), *Film Form* (New York, NY:
    Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949).

18 While Reid and Hoffmann clearly
    employ the Biehl murder to
    engage a US audience, this
    segment of the film does not
    marginalize the lives of black
    South Africans as do the
    Hollywood films discussed by Rob
    Nixon in *Homelands, Harlem, and
    Hollywood: South African Culture
    and the World Beyond* (New York,
    NY: Routledge, 1994).
19 For a discussion of the common
    tendency among historians
    opposed to apartheid to impose a
    model of subaltern resistance on
    popular culture, see Minkley and
    Rassool, 'Orality, memory, and
    social history in South Africa', pp.
    94–5.
20 Richard Wilson, *The Politics of
    Truth and Reconciliation in South
    Africa: Legitimizing the Post-
    Apartheid State* (New York, NY:
    Cambridge University Press, 2001),
    p. 50.

TRC.[16] A highly disjunctive and self-reflexive mode of documenting the TRC would be likely to shirk the ethical responsibility implicit in representing the testimonials of apartheid-era victims to both a domestic and an international audience. Instead of pursuing a highly reflexive strategy, Reid and Hoffmann therefore adapt the relatively orthodox observationalist mode of filmmaking to their documentation of the TRC. Yet *Long Night's Journey into Day* deploys this mode in the context of a dialectical narrative structure that emphasizes the clashing and at times contradictory viewpoints of testimonials delivered before the TRC. Like Sergei Eisenstein's theory and practice of montage, this dialectical strategy stirs up contradictions within the spectator's mind, encouraging her or him to unravel the broader social conflicts behind the testimony of individual victims.[17] *Long Night's Journey into Day* thereby works to challenge the significant lacunae in accounts of the TRC as a vehicle of reconciliation.

Reid and Hoffmann divide their film into four equal sections, each documenting a single appearance by an individual or group of people before the TRC. These different segments contrast strongly with one another, in some cases reinforcing the image of heroic popular resistance to apartheid while in others directly challenging it. Segment one, for example, focuses on the amnesty hearing of Mongezi Manquina, one of the killers of Amy Biehl, a young American student activist.[18] This account is juxtaposed with the film's second section, which examines the case of the Cradock Four, a group of black anti-apartheid activists who were murdered by security forces in the Eastern Cape in the 1980s. Manquina's shockingly affectless deposition about his murder of Biehl challenges hagiographic representations of popular resistance to apartheid, even while the following segment makes a case for precisely such celebratory accounts.[19] The film thereby excavates both the heroism as well as the rough realities of township justice during the late years of apartheid, practices whose existence the TRC tended to play down significantly.[20] The film follows this juxtaposition with the story of Robert McBride, an anti-apartheid guerrilla who bombed a nightclub on the Durban waterfront, killing a number of civilians as well as members of the apartheid security forces. The film's final segment focuses on the testimony offered by mothers of the Guguletu Seven, a group of young men who were lured into a trap by undercover police officers and then gunned down in cold blood. Like the first two segments, these sections of *Long Night's Journey into Day* play off one another to suggest the significant disjunction between official accounts of the TRC as a process of reconciliation and popular desires for retributive justice.

Each segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day* is further divided into interviews with victims of violence and with the perpetrators of that violence. Like the segmented narrative macro-structure of the film, this division of each segment into interviews with perpetrators and victims offers discordant versions of events and their causes that the film's viewer must carefully parse. In addition, each interview is broken up into

testimony delivered before the TRC and ancillary conversations conducted in far less formal, domestic settings. This split structure in *Long Night's Journey into Day* highlights the performative dimension of the TRC hearings, showing how witnesses adopt a persona for public appearances that is often very different from that in evidence in more informal circumstances. For example, as we witness women breaking into tears as they tell stories of their lost family members while sitting in the private spaces of their homes, we come to understand the immense emotional effort involved in their more resolute, dignified testimony in the public venues of the TRC. In many cases, the more elliptical commentary advanced during the ancillary interviews also offers important insights into the motivations behind individual acts and testimony. Interpolated throughout these four segments are brief interviews with members of the TRC such as Tutu and Mary Burton. While these interviews are usually couched as expository commentary on the segments in which they are embedded, the comments of interviewees within each of the segments establish a critical dialogue with the authoritative utterances of TRC icons such as Tutu within the film. Rapid cuts between contrasting interviews and montage shots throughout the film often expand these different levels of dialectical structure. Using this multi-tiered strategy of critical juxtaposition, *Long Night's Journey into Day* documents the power of embodied witnessing that the TRC facilitated while also uncovering the many forms of mendacity and inequality that germinated in the rank soil of apartheid.

Political violence and post-apartheid dissonance

Although human rights discourse has tended to assume a universalistic, transhistorical guise during the period of liberal hegemony that followed the various political transitions around the globe after 1990, *Long Night's Journey Into Day* emphasizes the need to place questions of rights and justice in South Africa in historical perspective. During the apartheid era, a bifurcated legal system was systematically created that meted out justice in transparently unequal, racialized terms. The result, as Richard Wilson emphasizes in his discussion of the TRC, was the *de facto* institution of legal pluralism in South Africa.[21] Resisting the attempts of the apartheid state to control and centralize the dispensation of justice, urban Africans in many cases retained local institutions of justice from the rural, pre-industrial social order from which they had been displaced by the apartheid system. The evolution of autonomous, intransigent township social movements was, of course, one of the central factors that led to the downfall of apartheid. It is precisely such independent institutions, however, that render human rights discourse relatively marginal among a significant percentage of South Africa's population today. Despite a proliferation of national institutions dedicated to fostering human rights, local groups continued to insist on their right to administer social order autonomously during the transition to democracy

21 Ibid., p. xx.

22 Ibid.

in the late 1990s. This attitude was hardened by the massive crime wave that affected post-apartheid South Africa, highly sceptical popular views concerning the institutions of criminal justice, and deepening economic inequality despite the end of official apartheid. The upshot, as Wilson puts it, was that 'enclaves of revenge controlled by militarized youth and punitive elders continued to shape the character of justice in the townships of South Africa' in the face of the official, state-centred discourse of reconciliation.[22]

The initial segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day* offers an overview of precisely such autonomous enclaves of revenge in its investigation of the murder of Amy Biehl by Mongezi Manquina and a group of young comrades in the townships outside Cape Town. Frantz Fanon's central claim in his study of colonial society – that the colonized person liberates her or himself in and through violence – is borne out in this opening segment of the film.[23] This segment is particularly important since, contrary to what one might expect, eighty per cent of the TRC's amnesty applicants were members of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's principal anti-apartheid organization. As Mahmood Mamdani has argued, the apartheid system was based on the colonial relationship of settler to native, a relationship that was secured through systematic violence.[24] Like Fanon's colonized subjects, young comrades such as Manquina sought to rupture this colonial relationship by turning the violence that oppressed them back against the whites of South Africa. Reid and Hoffmann use archival footage and dramatic recreation of police attacks on township youths to back up statements by Manquina and his comrades concerning the politicization of youth during the 1980s in reaction to the apartheid regime's systematic violence in the townships. These young people explicitly conceive of their acts as anti-colonial violence, a Fanonian assertion of the self in the face of apartheid's negation. Such violence is not, therefore, a product of primitive barbarism, but rather belongs, as Mamdani puts it, to the script of progress and modernity.[25] Yet, as Fanon and commentators such as Sartre were aware, this violence is always derivative. In order to dismantle the colonial relationship, victims became killers. Trapped in the political stalemate of the late apartheid era, youths like Manquina ended up reproducing the violence of the regime.

While providing Manquina space to articulate his political motivations in killing Biehl, *Long Night's Journey into Day* also explores the loss of humanity involved in this transformation of victim into killer by focusing on Manquina's mother, Evelyn. During her son's trial, Evelyn Manquina recorded a video letter in which she apologized to Biehl's parents for their daughter's murder. Reid and Hoffmann's film includes excerpts from this letter as well as an interview with Evelyn Manquina in which she explains that as a mother she identifies with the agony the Biehls must have felt over the death of their child. This portion of the film closes the gap of human identification that yawned so wide during the young comrades' testimony. Despite this admission of sympathy, this segment

23 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York, NY: Grove, 1963).

24 Mahmood Mamdani, 'A diminished truth', in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds), After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 59.

25 Mamdani, 'Making sense', p. 25.

of *Long Night's Journey into Day* concludes with a brief interview with Manquina's fellow amnesty applicant, Easy Nofemela. Nofemela repeats the words of his friend's mother, saying that the Biehls' forgiveness is truly miraculous given the loss of their only child. Nofemela thereby offers an apparently ideal example of restorative justice. In particular, Nofemela's identity as a killer shaped by the systematic violence of the apartheid system appears to have been transcended. However, near the close of the segment he also comments that he and his friends got the wrong person when they killed Biehl. This aside suggests that Nofemela feels little remorse for the general policy of attacking whites in the context of apartheid violence.

Brief comments such as this one reveal the lack of a unitary definition of justice in contemporary South Africa. National discourses of human rights and reconciliation appear to have made relatively little impact on members of township vigilante groups such as Manquina and Nofemela. They continue to view retributive justice against whites as a valid response to apartheid. Since the TRC effectively undermined the possibility for state dispensation of such retributive justice, the young comrades' grudging reaction to the amnesty hearings is not entirely surprising. While the Biko family's refusal to participate in the TRC process offered perhaps the most famous challenge to the TRC's framework, this segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day* suggests that resistance to the TRC's definitions of human rights and justice was widespread among significant sectors of South African society. [26]

Dissent created by the TRC's definition of human rights infractions and, by extension, of justice, is rendered even more explicit in the third segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day*. This portion of the film dramatizes the ANC's indignant reaction to the suggestion, published in the first five-volume instalment of the TRC's report in 1998, of moral equivalence between its own human rights violations and those of the apartheid regime.[27] In an interview conducted after his TRC hearing, McBride, a member of the ANC's military wing whose bomb killed a number of civilians, is quick to note the hypocrisy of the outrage expressed by supporters of the apartheid regime in reaction to the ANC's guerrilla activities. Nonetheless, his position makes it clear that the resistance movement's turn towards proportionate attacks on civilians is debatable on both humanitarian and strategic grounds. Strategically speaking, it quickly became clear that the liberation movement stood no chance of overthrowing the apartheid regime using military means.[28] Violence against civilians simply undermined the ANC's moral standing both within South Africa and internationally. The human cost of the ANC's doctrine of 'proportional response' in the context of a just war against apartheid is made evident when the directors of *Long Night's Journey into Day* incorporate footage of a witness before the TRC describing flesh hanging from the walls after McBride's bomb exploded.

But what right do the beneficiaries of the apartheid system, who tacitly condoned the violent actions of the regime, have to indict someone like

26 Stephen Bantu Biko was the founder of South Africa's Black Consciousness movement. He died in 1977 while in police custody, becoming an anti-apartheid martyr and international hero despite government attempts to cover up his murder. The Biko family have been outspoken critics of the closure effected by the TRC process on criminal prosecution of the perpetrators of apartheid-era violence.

27 For a forceful critique of the TRC's policy of moral equivalence, see Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal, and Ronald Suresh Roberts, 'When the assassin cries foul: the modern just war doctrine', in Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd, *Looking Back*, pp. 86–98.

28 On the stand off between the ANC and the apartheid regime, see Harold Wolpe, *Race, Class and the Apartheid State* (London: Currey, 1988).

McBride? This segment of the film confronts this question directly by juxtaposing McBride's perspective with that of Sharon Welgemoed, the sister of one of his victims. The filmmakers cut from McBride's expression of remorse directly to an interview with Welgemoed, who stands in the lush garden of her suburban home in Durban while a black gardener works in the background. Throughout this segment, she attacks ANC accounts of McBride as a hero, and, by extension, the movement's policy of guerrilla warfare against civilians. Reid and Hoffmann allow Welgemoed to express her anger at McBride's killing of her sister with no overt comment. Yet Welgemoed's words are always subtly qualified by the blithe arrogance with which she speaks and acts. For example, the mise-en-scene of her initial interview subtly communicates the affluence of apartheid's white beneficiaries, contrasting strongly with shots of township exteriors like Guguletu in other segments of the film. Later in the segment, the filmmakers include a scene in which, forced to undergo a body search before entering the courthouse at Durban for the TRC hearing, Welgemoed kicks up a fuss, saying she wants to see McBride being searched as well. The blustering tone of command that she adopts as she confronts the black security guards in this scene speaks volumes about the inequality of social relations during and after apartheid. As Truth Commissioner Burton comments, it is still very painful for whites such as Welgemoed to recognize how they benefited from apartheid. Indeed, near the end of this segment, Welgemoed states that she cannot be held responsible for all the atrocities of apartheid simply because she is white. By refusing to recognize the systematic character of apartheid's injustices and the culpability of beneficiaries such as herself, Welgemoed dramatizes the flaws inherent in the TRC's limited definition of human rights violations. While offering an indictment of the ANC's policies by one of its own cadres, this segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day* also demonstrates the challenge of creating a genuinely reciprocal ethical space for reconciliation among beneficiaries and victims of apartheid in South Africa today.

Subaltern history and national reconciliation

What does it mean, *Long Night's Journey into Day* asks, to seek the truth in the wake of apartheid's systematic destruction of the potential for human interaction? Like the differing definitions of justice that collided during the hearings, the TRC also brought incommensurable narratives of history before the public. Focusing on the case of the Guguletu Seven, a group of black youths who died in a firefight with the police during the 1980s, the final segment of *Long Night's Journey into Day* explores the apartheid regime's control of truth within the public sphere. Yet it also demonstrates the existence of subaltern public spheres, some of which were associated with the liberation movement and some of which existed in complete autonomy from organized political factions. As Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman argue, such alternative public spheres allow the

29 Das and Kleinman, 'Introduction',
p. 3.

articulation and dissemination of experiences silenced by officially sanctioned narratives.[29] Yet what happens during a negotiated transition such as that experienced in South Africa, when only certain aspects of the alternative public sphere are memorialized? How can truth and the voice with which to speak it be recovered under such circumstances? *Long Night's Journey into Day* explores this question by focusing on the mothers of the Guguletu Seven, who were told by the apartheid bureaucracy that their sons were communist insurgents who died while seeking to ambush members of the security forces. This final segment of the film is divided into roughly three sections, each of which juxtaposes two different versions of the truth. Although the mothers ultimately glean a satisfactory understanding of their children's fate with the help of the TRC, their highly varied reactions to this knowledge suggests that the TRC's hearings do not necessarily bring closure to those traumatized by apartheid.

As in the film *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), this section of *Long Night's Journey into Day* offers a reenactment of events that exposes the unbearable grief of victims in public.[30] The pain and anger that have been totally erased by apartheid become, in the public recitation of loss offered by the mothers of the Guguletu Seven, iconic symbols of the nation's suppressed history. As Tutu comments during this bitterly painful scene, 'We want our children to remember these stories, that we paid a price to be free today'. His words represent the death of the women's sons as a sacrifice that has helped give birth to the new South Africa. Scenes of the massive funeral demonstrations for the Guguletu Seven back up this point. Like the death of Maki Skosana, a woman necklaced in the townships for being a suspected informer, the violent deaths of the Guguletu Seven and their mothers' grief are represented as key components in the narrative of national becoming.[31] The televised coverage of the TRC hearing into Skosana's death focused on the moment when, after describing the gruesome details of her death and mutilation, her sister was cut off by the commissioners, who asked for a minute of silence to salute Skosana's heroic martyrdom. According to Steve Robins, this silencing of the witness demonstrates how the TRC and the media sought to manufacture a new nationalism from the lacerating personal memories and broken bodies of apartheid-era victims.[32] In addition to imposing such metanarratives, media coverage of the hearings tended to foster a pornography of violence, in which mutilated bodies were paraded before viewers in a spectacle bereft of historical analysis.[33] Stories of ordinary people's grief, the alternative public sphere of the apartheid era, are thus symbolically constituted as central to the democratic South Africa.

30 For analysis of *Shoah* as an
alternative to conventional
documentary representations of
the Holocaust, see Bruzzi, *New
Documentary*, pp. 105–13.

31 'Necklacing' was a practice
developed to punish suspected
informers in the townships during
the 1980s. The 'necklace'
consisted of a petrol-filled car tyre
that was slung around the neck of
the suspected informer and then
set alight, burning the victim to
death.

32 Steve Robins, 'Silence in my
father's house: memory,
nationalism, and narratives of the
body', in Nuttall and Coetzee
(eds), *Negotiating the Past*, p. 138.

33 Rory Bester, 'Trauma and truth', in
Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds),
*Experiments with Truth:
Transitional Justice and the
Processes of Truth and
Reconciliation* (Ostfildern-Ruit:
Hatje Cantz, 2002), p. 168.

However, *Long Night's Journey into Day* does not examine narrative alone. The film also focuses on the truths embodied in the suffering physical presence of the Guguletu Seven mothers. For instance, the women were given permission to attend a screening of a film made by the police involved in the incident. This video was intended by the police to

34 For a discussion of the general insensitivity of commentators to the role of emotional breakdowns in illuminating the truth of witnesses' testimony, see Rustom Bharucha, 'Between truth and reconciliation', in Enwezor et al. (eds), Experiments with Truth, p. 372.

demonstrate their efficiency to members of the government and thereby secure increased funding for their branch. The women sit directly behind the nine police officers subpoenaed by the TRC while the film is screened. Watching the film, in which the police pose next to the slain youths as if they were animal carcasses, the women lose control of their emotions and break out into screams of pain and wild gesticulations. The police are escorted from the room looking visibly shaken. No commentary is offered to anneal the pain of the women. The version of events represented in the police video is utterly discredited on an emotional level by this scene. In addition, although the TRC's final report subordinated narrative to forensic truth, this scene prioritizes the truth of the mothers' experience, expressed through the complete breakdown of language under the burden of unbearable pain.[34] If the TRC was sometimes seen as giving language back to such shattering cries through its collection of objective statistics, *Long Night's Journey into Day* focuses on the raw truth of these exclamations and gesticulations.

There is a strong element of catharsis in this scene, which offers a highly theatrical spectacle in which the repressed memories of the apartheid era are reawakened and purged. By focusing on these images of catharsis, Reid and Hoffmann place the suffering of the most marginal South Africans at the centre of a new national history. To what extent does this transmutation of individual grief into public narrative constitute, as Steve Robins argues concerning Skosana, a form of silencing? Although *Long Night's Journey into Day* focuses on the emotions of the Guguletu Seven mothers as they discover and reckon with the truth concerning their sons, it does not conclude its account of the TRC with this moment of catharsis. This portion of the film investigates the extent to which the TRC has led to a real institutional transformation that might offer some concrete recompense for the suffering of mothers like Cynthia Ngewu. The last scene of *Long Night's Journey into Day* focuses on a meeting between Thapelo Mbelo, an informer whose forthright testimony concerning the homicidal instructions he was given helped puncture the credibility of the police version of events in Guguletu, and the mothers of the youths he helped kill. There is no institutional mechanism for such a meeting; instead, the encounter takes place at Mbelo's request so that he can apologize in person to the women. At the conclusion of this excruciatingly painful scene, Ngewu says that holding on to her anger is useless and that she therefore forgives Mbelo. The rhetoric of Christianity and absolution employed by Tutu plays an important role in Ngewu's absolution of Mbelo. While this scene of forgiveness is the last one we are shown by the film, prior to this we hear other mothers expressing their anger at their sons' killer. In one particularly powerful image, one of them stands up to display her emaciated body, saying that she has wasted away because of the suffering associated with her son's death. How, she asks Mbelo, can you make this right? Another mother complains that they have no jobs, no material possessions to fall back on, and no sons to support them in

their old age. Thus, despite the conclusion of the scene with Ngewu's forgiveness of Mbelo, the feelings of anger and discontent the other women articulate indict not simply Mbelo but the entire process of national reconciliation embodied in the TRC. The TRC controversially lacked a mechanism to secure not simply material recompense but psychological counseling for those who, like the mothers of the Guguletu Seven and Nomonde Calata of the film's second segment, remain wounded by the apartheid era.[35] The sustained focus of *Long Night's Journey into Day* on victims suggests that the TRC too easily neglected the enduring character of suffering even while it memorialized the heroic sacrifices of the past.[36] Although *Long Night's Journey into Day* closes on a note of reconciliation, the directors incorporate comments from the mothers that offer significant dissent from the metanarrative of nation building. Their cathartic expressions of pain may have been instrumentalized as part of a narrative of national reconciliation by the ANC, but *Long Night's Journey into Day* tells us that the suffering and the inequalities of the apartheid era endure in the new South Africa. Hoffman and Reid's film inverts the title of Eugene O'Neill's modernist play of familial alienation and decay. Implicit in this inversion is a teleological view of South Africa's transformation during the recent democratic era. A highly contested and contradictory process of negotiation is thereby represented in patently optimistic and perhaps even romantic terms.[37] Does the film's focus on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission lead it to elide many elements of apartheid's legacy that continue to have an impact on South Africans? Discriminatory racial classifications, pass laws, massive forced removals, and the denial of education, democracy, and adequate living standards to the majority of the nation's population, among other apartheid-era injustices, were not the focus of the TRC. Instead, the commissioners were charged to investigate only brutal abuses such as torture, kidnapping, and assassination, crimes that were illegal even under apartheid laws.

This, Mahmood Mamdani has forcefully argued, was the fundamental flaw of the body. By focusing exclusively on 'gross human rights violations', the TRC failed to indict the principal injustices of apartheid. Indeed, the body tacitly accepted the racist legal framework of the apartheid era. According to Mamdani, 'the TRC's version of truth was established through narrow lenses, crafted to reflect the experience of a tiny minority: on the one hand, perpetrators, being state-agents; and, on the other, victims, being political activists'.[38] The TRC, Mamdani argues, was based on a faulty analogy with Latin American experiences, one that obscured the colonial character of apartheid. South Africa's apartheid system was not based, as were the Latin American dictatorships, simply on the retention of dictatorial power through orchestrated terror. Under apartheid, state power was intimately linked with more broadly experienced racialized privilege through the systematic dispossession and exploitation of the non-white majority of

35 Members of the TRC expressed frustration at the government's highly equivocal attitude to reparations and rehabilitation. Mary Burton, interview with the author, 15 June 2000.

36 For a Derridean account of the partiality of the historical archive created by the TRC, see Colin Bundy, 'The beast of the past: history and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', in James and van de Vijver, *After the TRC*, p. 15.

37 For an extremely critical political economy of the negotiated transition, see Hein Marais, *South Africa, Limits to Change: the Political Economy of Transition* (New York, NY: Zed Books, 1998).

38 Mamdani, 'A diminished truth', pp. 58–61.

the population. As a result of the 'narrow lenses' through which the TRC viewed South African history, this legacy of systematic injustice – one that long predates the official era of apartheid – was written out of the official discourse of the new South Africa. Indeed, the TRC was ordered to investigate solely crimes committed between 1960 to 1994. This severely circumscribed historical period elides the first twelve years of the apartheid regime, not to mention the four hundred years of colonial power that preceded it.

Is it possible to promote genuine reconciliation when the systematic injustices of the apartheid past and the post-apartheid present have yet to be confronted? Both the TRC and accounts of that process such as *Long Night's Journey into Day* raise this difficult question. Historians have argued that, by focusing exclusively on gross human rights violations, the TRC helped erase the oppressive quotidian experience of South Africa's majority from the historical record, thereby tacitly legitimating the continued inequality of an economically and socially polarized nation.[39] As an aesthetic work, however, *Long Night's Journey into Day* mobilizes processes of identification that check this tendency to elide subaltern history. Focusing on the testimony of both victims and perpetrators before the TRC, the film creates a dialectical interplay that challenges preconceptions of an easy resolution to the legacy of apartheid. The film thereby helps insert the highly contested and uneven character of South Africa's transition to democracy in the historical archives. Although Reid and Hoffmann do not use their film to investigate the broad systemic inequalities of apartheid, their focus on the conditions that led to human rights violations in South Africa situates state violence within a social context. By documenting the tensions and compromises within the TRC, *Long Night's Journey into Day* offers a powerful record of the contradictions in South Africa's celebrated transition to democracy.

39 Bundy, 'The beast of the past', p. 11.

Soviet–American 'cinematic diplomacy' in the 1930s: could the Russians really have infiltrated Hollywood?

BRIAN D. HARVEY

When the realm of politics and the world of art intersect, or in some cases collide, does the interaction or the clash substantially affect the outcome of events in either world? This essay reflects upon the conflicting interests of Hollywood in the USSR and of the Soviet film industry in the American film capital during a key period before and after US diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933, asking how did this event affect film exchange between the two countries? What is striking about this period is that every major Hollywood studio planned a Soviet-themed film while there was interest on the Soviet side in popular American cinema and in the efficient and profitable economic structure of Hollywood studios. Yet despite a political climate that was conducive to collaboration and degrees of mutual interest on both sides, none of the planned film projects materialized; nor was Boris Shumiatskii, head of the Soviet film industry, able to construct the 'Soviet Hollywood' in the Crimea that he planned with the assistance of blueprints drafted by US architects. Despite the lack of concrete outcomes to the various initiatives, I shall argue that they nevertheless reveal a generally unrecognized episode in the film histories of both countries, in a pre-Cold War climate when the global interests of both film industries found that they had much in common. While most histories concentrate on films that were produced, in this case research into planned but unrealized

projects, which can be explained by a specific historical context, can shed light on the impact of politics on culture and vice-versa.

While Soviet–American relations were strained for much of the twentieth century, there was a brief period (1931–4) when in film and diplomatic terms 'recognition' impacted on both politics and culture. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the USA refused to recognize the Soviet government. In 1933, however, Roosevelt determined that the American public no longer strongly opposed acknowledging the Communist regime. It was hoped that the resulting diplomatic agreements of 1933 would stimulate trade between the two countries and create a greater degree of international stablilty.[1] Harpo Marx, the first 'Hollywood diplomat' to visit the USSR right after US recognition, appeared with members of the Moscow Art Theatre and recorded the optimism of the moment:

> And on the next day, at 7:50 a.m., to be exact, while I was having my prunes, rolls, and tea in the hotel dining room, Russia became – officially – a friendly country. That was the prearranged time for the pact worked out between Litvinov and Roosevelt to go into effect. The United States now recognized the Soviet Union, and the USSR now recognized the USA.[2]

Immediately before, however, Soviet directors who visited Hollywood were met with suspicion and even hostility. When Eisenstein visited Hollywood, Major Pease, the head of the Technical Directors' Institute, conducted a campaign against the Soviet director and against the Paramount administration for employing him, calling Eisenstein 'Hollywood's Messenger from Hell'.[3] The projects he worked on, including an adaptation of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, were not produced, and his contract was swiftly terminated in October 1930. As William Richardson concludes:

> the political situation in Southern California was not favorable for a Soviet film director hoping to make a film criticizing any aspect of American life. As the Depression worsened, so too did the chances for any proposal of Eisenstein to be accepted for production.[4]

His trip to Hollywood coincided with debates for and against the USA resuming diplomatic relations and trading with the Soviet government. The rise in anti-Soviet sentiment during 1930 and 1931 resulted from US confusion about the nature and purpose of the Five-Year Plan and the role of foreign commercial ties in the development of the Soviet planned economic experiment.[5]

Rather than ease this tense situation, and contrary to what many people expected, relations between the USA and the USSR deteriorated after recognition in 1933.[6] Yet the rhetoric surrounding this event created a climate of opinion that was conducive, among certain individuals in Hollywood and the USSR, to collaboration. Many of the contradictory feelings around 'diplomatic recognition' manifested themselves in terms

1   Lester H. Brune, *Chronological History of US Foreign Relations*, Volume II (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 492.

2   Harpo Marx with Rowland Barber, *Harpo Speaks* (New York, NY: Limelight Editions, 1961), p. 314.

3   William Richardson, 'Eisenstein and California: the "Sutter's Gold" episode', *California History* (Fall 1980), p. 199.
4   Ibid., p. 200.
5   For contemporary book-length studies of this question, see S.G. Bron, *Soviet Economic Development and American Business* (New York, NY: Horace Liveright, 1930); M.P. Buehler, *Selected Articles on Recognition of Soviet Russia* (New York, NY: HW Wilson, 1931); *Recognition of Russia, University Debater's Annual, 1930–31* (New York, NY: HW Wilson, 1931); Louis Fischer, *Why Recognize Russia?: the Arguments For and Against the Recognition of the Soviet Government by the United States* (New York, NY: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931); and J.K. Trevor, *The Recognition of Soviet Russia: the US and the Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: The America Foundation, 1933).
6   Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2003), p. 138.

of Hollywood's cultural and economic ambitions for world markets, and some key individuals sought to capitalize on the work of Soviet writers who lent an air of 'cultural capital' to genuine curiosity about the USSR and the topicality of the Five-Year Plan. My focus in this essay is on Soviet Russian writers as film scenarists and their collaboration with or ties to various Hollywood directors, most notably Frank Capra, Lewis Milestone and Cecil B. DeMille. I will also investigate the reception of Boris Shumiatskii in Hollywood and his plans to develop the Soviet film industry, as well as discussing some of the Hollywood personalities who visited the USSR in the early to mid 1930s.

Hollywood and Soviet writers

Irving Thalberg and Frank Capra

In the early 1930s Hollywood was interested in employing established authors to write scenarios, often adapted from successful novels. As Saverio Giovacchini has stated: 'New Yorkers and Europeans had "gone Hollywood" en masse, and by 1932 *Fortune* magazine noted that the ranks of Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) comprised "more members of the literati than it took to produce the King James Bible"'.[7] One notable instance of this was the work of the writer Boris Pil'niak at MGM for the film project *Soviet* (1931–34), a pet project of Irving Thalberg that was to be directed by Capra. Biographies of Thalberg neglect to mention *Soviet*, but in his autobiography Capra does recall it:

> From the dozen scripts he [Thalberg] had me read I chose *Soviet*, a strong melodrama about an American engineer hired to build a super dam in Russia. Thalberg promised me a 'dream' cast: Wally Beery, Marie Dressler, Joan Crawford, and Clark Gable – wow! Nearing *Soviet*'s starting date, frail Thalberg had to go to Europe for health reasons. Left in sole command, Mayer couldn't wait to harpoon Thalberg's pet projects. He canceled *Soviet*, sent me packing back to Columbia.[8]

Soviet reflected the topical interest in some 3000 US engineers engaged on Soviet construction sites at the height of the Soviet First Five-Year Plan and the American Great Depression. Plans were made to film at Hoover Dam and with the consultation of the US photographer Margaret Bourke-White; Soviet authorities were approached about filming on location in the Soviet Union, but such requests were turned down. In its earlier versions, MGM's story was about the construction of the largest steel plant in the world, called Steel. Before Pil'niak was invited to Hollywood, MGM's leading scenarist, Frances Marion, had drafted a scenario entitled *The Blue Story*. Pil'niak's treatment, about a US engineer working in the USSR and retitled *The Russian Story*, is remarkable for its inclusion of details that might be considered to be progagandist, or at least explanatory, to American audiences who might not know the details of the Five-Year Plan and collective farms.[9]

7 *Fortune* (December 1932), p. 63; cited in Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 15.

8 See Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: an Autobiography* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1997), p. 161.

9 Boris Pilnyak, *The Russian Story*, Script Department no. 34384, MGM Studios, 20 May 1931. A draft version of Pil'niak's MGM document is available for consultation in the Joseph Freeman Collection at the Hoover Institution, together with a copy of Pil'niak's contract with MGM. See also 'Metro buys a Soviet worker's script for $30,000 – in Russian', *Variety*, 23 June 1931, p. 4.

In view of Capra's own proclivity for populist, anticapitalist narratives, this interest in Soviet themes is not altogether surprising. His films were popular in the USSR, and journalist Alva Johnson called him a 'social revolutionist'. In an interview in the 1970s, Capra described the final script version as follows, which I quote at length since it is the most detailed account of what the film would have been like had it been produced:

It was about the building of a dam in Russia with an American engineer supervising it. Wally Berry was going to play the role of a commissar who was given the job of building this great dam. He didn't know anything about engineering, but was a man in charge who had made his way up from the bottom of the Bolshevik regime. Marie Dressler was his wife, and a very patient, loving wife she was. Joan Crawford was to play a very, very politically minded gal who was the assistant commissar. Clark Gable was an American engineer, sent over to help them build this dam. The conflicts were personal and ideological: the American wants to get things done and the commissar wants to get them done in his own way. Gable falls in love with Joan Crawford, and they have a running battle: he hates anything that is Communistic – all this plus the drama of building this dam. Nothing but great battles: they fought nature, they fought each other, they fought the elements, all to get this great dam built. ... I want to tell you about the end of the film. They were celebrating the completion of the dam. The Wally Berry character was particularly complex. One of his hands had been cut off, and on his remaining hand he wore a handcuff – with an empty handcuff dangling – as a symbol of his slavery under the Czarist system that had cut off his hand – he never took this handcuff off. During the celebration the camera pans down the enormous face of the dam and then moves into a close-up and there is this handcuff sticking out of the cement – Berry has been buried inside the dam.[10]

As Capra's summary reveals, the film would have contained notable discourses on ideology, progress and technology, the handcuffs in the cement perhaps symbolizing the sacrifices made in the name of the revolution and of the continual need to erase the legacy of the 'old order'. This bears intertextual resemblance to the famous last scene of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924) in which the protagonist ends up handcuffed to his dead antagonist in the desert, preventing him from benefiting from the gold for which he has killed. The theme of monumental technology was also expressed in other contemporary films, but involving different international collaborations, most notably Britain and the USA in *The Tunnel* (Maurice Elvey, UK, 1935), a film that was released in French and German versions and which expressed ambivalence about the human cost of monumental building projects, in this case a tunnel linking Europe and the USA.[11]

10 Richard Glatzer and John Raeburn (eds), *Frank Capra: The Man and His Films* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1975), pp. 29–30.

11 For details of these films and the theme of monumental technology see J.P. Telotte, *A Distant Technology: Science Fiction Film and the Machine Age* (Hanover, MA and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999).

12 Alva Johnston, *The Saturday Evening Post* (14 May 1938). On the populist ideology of Frank Capra, see Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 87–9.

13 Il'ia Erenburg, *Materializatsiia fantastiki* (Moscow: Kinopechat', 1927), and *Fabrika snov* (Berlin: Petropolis, 1931).

14 Ilya Erenburg, *Truce, 1921–33* (*Volume III, Men, Years-Life*), trans. Tatiana Shebunina, in collaboration with Yvonne Kapp (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), pp. 124–30, and *Liudi, gody, zhizn'*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966), pp. 509–14. See also Anatol Goldberg, *Ilya Ehrenburg: Revolutionary Novelist, Poet, War Correspondent, Propagandist: the Extraordinary Epic of a Russian Survivor* (New York, NY: Viking, 1984), p. 96.

15 Lewis Milestone Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Milestone's papers include a typescript of a script based on Erenburg's novel called *Red Square*.

16 Ilya Erenburg, *Eve of the War, 1933–1941*, trans. Tatiana Shebunina, in collaboration with Yvonne Kapp (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), pp. 9–10, and *Liudi gody, zhizn'*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 7–8.

Clearly in this case Thalberg and Capra were the driving force behind a project that easily crumbled when halted by a studio boss who was perhaps nervous about the subject matter despite its notable contemporary theme. In an article entitled 'Capra shoots as he pleases', Alva Johnston, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, noted that the 'unborn photoplay' *Soviet* was 'the best thing he [Capra] ever worked on. . ... He was getting ready to shoot it for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, when the company decided it was full of controversial dynamite and put it on the shelf'.[12] In the 1930s a studio boss could halt a project some way into its development, since the system's bias meant that ultimate power lay with the producer rather than the director. Even though Thalberg was vice president of MGM, it was possible, in the circumstances described above, that he could be overruled by MGM's president Louis B. Mayer. 'Controversial dynamite' or not, it appears that no efforts were made to resuscitate the project, although Capra was not alone in wanting to pursue Soviet themes, as demonstrated by the interest shown by Lewis Milestone.

Lewis Milestone

Lewis Milestone (who was subsequently one of the Hollywood Ten during the postwar, McCarthyist era) was another major US director who was interested in acquiring and adapting Soviet properties. He visited the Russian-emigre writer Vladimir Nabokov in Berlin to explore the rights to *Kamera Obskura*, and was particularly keen to work with Il'ia Erenburg, a writer who had written two 'film books' and frequently returned to the cinema and film personalities in his journalism.[13] In 1927 he wrote a script for G.W. Pabst's *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney/The Love of Jenny Ney*.[14] Together with the screenwriter Laurence Stallings, Milestone subsequently adapted Il'ia Erenburg's *The Rise and Fall of Nikolai Kurbov* as a project called *Red Square* for Columbia Pictures.[15] The Russian artist Natan Altman was to have designed the costumes. *Red Square*, however, was not produced by Columbia Pictures, sharing a similar fate to Thalberg's and Capra's projects. Erenburg writes about this in his autobiography:

> He [Milestone] decided to make a film out of my novel *The Life and Death of Nikolai Kurbov*. I tried to dissuade him: I did not care for this old book and besides, it would have been ridiculous in 1933 to show an idealistic Communist aghast at the sweeping tide of NEP [New Economic Policy]. Milestone pressed me to write a scenario in any case, suggesting that I alter the story and describe the construction works and the Five-Year Plan: 'Let the Americans see what the Russians are capable of achieving'. I have great doubts about my ability to do the job. I am no playwright and I was not sure I could produce a decent scenario, while a rehash of several books combined seemed to me silly. But I liked Milestone and agreed to try and write the script with his collaboration.[16]

Milestone invited him to a small English seaside resort in order to collaborate. *The Life and Downfall of Nikolai Kurbov* chronicles a

committed member of the Cheka (the precursor to the KGB), who toils away against 'enemies of the people'. However, his commitment and faith are undercut when the New Economic Policy (NEP) is announced, and he shoots himself. Erenburg reports that Milestone showed the script to Harry Cohn, president of Columbia, who apparently said, 'Too much social stuff and not enough sex. This is no time for throwing money down the drain'.[17] In any event, Erenburg was paid and used the money to celebrate the New Year, 1934, in style at a Polish restaurant in Paris. Another project failed to materialize because of the interventon of a studio boss. Milestone's interest in the USSR did not end there, however, since during World War II he directed *The North Star*, with a screenplay about the Soviet Union written by Lillian Hellman.

17 Ibid., p. 8.

Cecil B. DeMille
DeMille visited the Soviet Union in the early 1930s before US recognition and subsequently explored the rights to a variety of Soviet literary properties, including Valentin Kataev's *Squaring the Circle*, Alekandr Tarasov-Rodionov's *Chocolate* and Evgenii Zamiatin's *Atilla*. Zamiatin, who had recently emigrated to the west, wrote to DeMille in 1932 from Berlin about the possibility of working in his Hollywood studios. The two had met in Moscow in September 1931 during DeMille's trip to Soviet Russia.[18] DeMille replied that he had written to the American Consulate in Berlin, as Zamiatin had requested: 'We are in need of good dramatic brains more than ever at the present time, for good dramatic fare is very scarce; and the "depressions" make it difficult for even good dramatic entertainment to produce good financial results'.[19] But this trip never materialized, despite Zamiatin's patience. As late as 1934, he still hoped to go to DeMille's studios. Eugene Lyons, a US writer who had just completed an assignment in Moscow as the United Press correspondent and planned to work in Hollywood on several adaptations of Russian literary works, wrote to DeMille in April 1934, mentioning the project about which DeMille and the novelist had spoken three years earlier:

18 For an account of his trip, see Donald Hayne (ed.), *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), pp. 308–13.

19 Unpublished letter, 22 March 1932, from DeMille, Hollywood, to Zamiatin, Paris. Zamiatin Papers, Box 1: Correspondence, Bakhmeteff Archive.

> Incidentally, I have brought with me a batch of Russian plays and novels and for which I hold the film rights. One or two might interest you. When you were in Russia you may recall meeting Eugene Zamiatin, the novelist, and talking to him about a scenario on the life and loves of Atilla. Zamiatin is now in Paris. He gave me a sort of synopsis of his idea for such a scenario. I think it leaves much to be desired. But I'll bring it on with me to Hollywood as the basis for further work.[20]

20 Unpublished letter, 6 April 1934, from Eugene Lyons, New York, to DeMille. Cecil B. DeMille Collection, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

As well as exploring possible projects with DeMille, Zamiatin tried other avenues that did not result in a contract. Writing to Joan Malamuth, wife of American translator Charles Malamuth, in Hollywood on 29 December 1932, Zamiatin indicated that his negotiations with Feature

21 Postcard to Joan Malamuth, Hollywood, from Zamiatin, Paris. Charles Malamuth Papers, Bakhmeteff Archives.

22 'D-503', Box 1: Manuscripts, Evgenii Zamiatin Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive.

23 Anthony Slide (ed.), *The American Film Industry: a Historical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 26, 118.

24 See Louella P. Parsons, 'Russian films reek with woe, says Schenck', *Los Angeles Examiner*, 16 September 1928, section 5, pp. 7–8; from 'Motion Pictures: Foreign – Russia' file, *LA Examiner* clips, Cinema Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

25 Unpublished letter in Russian, 14 May 1935, from Zamiatin, Paris. Malamuth Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive. Zamiatin adds a footnote indicating that he would send *Le grand amour Goya* later, after he had transcribed it. Zamiatin's papers include: *Le Tzar prisonnier/L'amour du Tzar)*, a film scenario (in French); *Goya; Le grand amour de Goya*, notes for apparently related film scenarios (in French); film scenarios based on his play *Atilla—Bich Bozhii* (in Russian) and *The Scourge of God* (in English); and *Pikovaia dama*, a film scenario (in Russian). The English version *The Captured Tsar* and the French version *Le Flean de Dieu* are not preserved in his papers.

26 'Moscow Romance', 23 June 1934. Box 3 (second copy in Box 4), Eugene Lyons Collection, Hoover Institution Archives. The Lyons Collection at Hoover contains no additional information about this project. There is, however, an exchange of telegrams between Lyons and George Oppenheimer of United Artists Corporation in Eugene Lyons Papers, Box 2, Special Collections, Library, University of Oregon, Eugene.

Productions about the filming of his novel, presumably *We*, had fallen through:

> Many thanks for your charming letter and your inquiries. Unfortunately now they have but platonic value to me for this affair of filming my novel broke down – at any rate as far as one place ('Feature Productions') is concerned. Perhaps later I should mail you the synopsis of my novel and use your kind offer of being my 'representative in Hollywood'.[21]

Zamiatin's Papers at the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia University include a scenario, entitled *D-503* (in Russian, with an English translation) based on *We*.[22] Feature Productions was created in 1925 by Joseph M. Schenck and was in existence through 1933, producing a number of features at what became known as the Samuel Goldwyn Studios in Hollywood.[23] Possibly, Zamiatin and Schenck met during the Hollywood producer's trip to Soviet Russia in 1928.[24] One of Eisenstein's developed projects for Paramount was a film entitled *Glass House*, certain aspects of which were inspired, in part, by Zamiatin's novel.

Like Pil'niak, Zamiatin turned to MGM, and Charles Malamuth helped him in this regard. Writing to Malamuth in May 1935, he expressed his continuing desire to go to the United States and enclosed four scenarios: *The Captured Tsar*, about Alexander II; *Le grand amour de Goya*; *Le Flean de Dieu*, about Atilla; and *Pikovaia dama/The Queen of Spades*. He wrote that apparently *The Captured Tsar* was 'in the hands of Metro-Goldwin' (sic) and that *Atilla* was 'a theme, of course, for Cecil B. DeMille'.[25] But yet again, despite all these efforts and enquiries, Zamiatin's work was not adapted by Hollywood for the screen. It seems that in this case the projects did not get quite as far as Capra's attempts with *Soviet*, although it is certainly the case that Zamiatin was supported by enthusiastic 'talent scouts' and advocates such as Lyons and Malamuth. Furthermore, Lyons had his own reasons for promoting Soviet authors since he was quite anxious to break into the film industry upon his return to the USA. In addition to his work with DeMille, he wrote an original screenplay, *Moscow Romance*, collaborating with Vicki Baum, author of *Grand Hotel*. The screenplay was intended for Samuel Goldwyn as a vehicle for the Soviet actress Anna Sten, recently imported by Goldwyn to Hollywood to rival Garbo and Dietrich.[26]

As well as these significant figures who were keen to promote interest in Soviet subject matter, and whose career interests coincided with the broader culture of 'recognition', regular studio employees were also on the lookout for potential material. One of DeMille's employees, for example, sent him a memo on 26 December 1934 with a clipping from the *Illustrated Daily News* in which E.V. Durling's 'film bet' was Mikhail Sholokov's *Quiet Flows the Don*, which he claimed was 'a book of film possibilities equal to *All Quiet on the Western Front*'. The employee noted that the book would 'not be published in America until

27 Cecil B. DeMille Collection, Brigham Young University.

July'; however, she requested that a synopsis from the galleys of the book should be obtained from the New York office.[27] So, there was clearly a willingness on the part of some key players to promote Soviet authors, but the process of collaboration could be too complicated, as the next example demonstrates.

In addition to his plans to film Kataev's *Squaring the Circle*, DeMille's other major project was an adaptation of Aleksandr Tarasov-Rodionov's *Chocolate*. The publicity and rumour surrounding DeMille's *Chocolate* conveyed the problem of copyright, which contributed to the project's cancellation and may have been a further complicating factor in adapting Soviet novels. In particular, a dispatch from Moscow published in *Variety* in December 1933, entitled 'Soviet authors watch Hollywood as market', reported rather sarcastically that yet another Soviet writer wanted to come to Hollywood:

> Hollywood's renewed interest in Soviet themes following Washington recognition of Moscow is causing a minor flurry among local authors. They are not at all averse to having their stuff put into American flickers and rewarded with American greenbacks, inflated or otherwise. It is known that Alexander Tarasov-Rodionov, author of *Chocolate*, has hinted to Cecil B. DeMille his readiness to give a personal hand in its shooting. In general Soviet scribblers are watching the news from Hollywood to see whether their masterpieces are being filched. Their fear is that self-appointed go-betweens will sell Russian plays and books without the author's knowledge. They know that they have little or no legal protection as yet in the USA. But they are ready to make entry through the press. Most of them have copyright protection in Germany and other countries. A flicker down without their consent would therefore run into trouble as soon as it left America. [28]

28 See reports in *Variety*, 12 December and 26 December 1933.

The issue of income was indeed an important one to Tarasov-Rodionov, who wrote to DeMille stating that as author of the book, and as one who had worked in the Soviet film industry, he would be of invaluable assistance. He then inquired about what kind of agreement DeMille wished to make and noted that he had signed a contract with Malamuth, appointing the translator as his representative in the USA, all income from a motion picture being divided equally between the two. Tarasov-Rodionov requested that complete payment be made, not to Malamuth but to his account at a Berlin address.[29] These negotiations did not advance the project and the film was never made.

Clearly there were particular complications resulting from adapting Soviet works for the screen, and, as this example illustrates, some were critical about the writers' motivation for allowing their work to be used by Hollywood studios. While it is not clear how many projects were cancelled because of difficulties over copyright and payment, this issue was undoubtedly an added complication that may well have proved in some cases, as with *Chocolate*, to be insuperable.

29 Unpublished letter, 3 December 1933, from A. Tarasov-Rodionov, Moscow, to Cecil B. DeMille, Hollywood. DeMille Collection, Brigham Young University.

Americans in the USSR

As well as Soviet writers being interested in working in and for Hollywood, some US film personnel went to the USSR during this period. Indeed, there is evidence that there was a mutual interest in films produced by both countries. Grigorii Aleksandrov's production of *The Circus* (1936), for example, demonstrates how Hollywood influenced contemporary Soviet film production and vice-versa. During his stay in Hollywood, Aleksandrov had been impressed by Busby Berkeley's techniques in film musicals. The Hollywood director Ernst Lubitsch was visiting Moscow the very week in 1936 that *The Circus* premiered. A clever piece of musical comedy propaganda, *The Circus* tells the tale of an American circus star who has to 'escape' from the USA to the USSR because she has a black baby. The director of *The Circus*, Aleksandrov, had been with the Eisenstein troupe in Hollywood in 1930. Moreover, the film scenario was written by the satirist team of Il'f and Petrov, who had visited Hollywood in 1935 and briefly collaborated with Milestone, and the scenario was also written by Valentin Kataev as an adaptation of his play *Pod kupolom tsyrka/Under the Circus Dome*.[30] The Soviet depiction of an American woman prefigures Lubitsch's success three years later with a Hollywood depiction of a Soviet woman; Lubitsch's visit to the USSR may have provided him with useful background and inspiration when he directed *Ninotchka* (1939).[31]

An example of Soviet–American 'cinematic diplomacy', where an American went to the USSR to work on a film project there, is illustrated by Langston Hughes's involvement in the film project *Black and White* at the Mezhrabpomfilm Studios in 1932.[32] Hughes and some twenty figures of the Harlem Renaissance were invited to Moscow. Only when he got there did Hughes discover that he was to 'doctor' an existing script full of stereotypes of the American South. Meanwhile, the most prominent US engineer in the USSR, Colonel Hugh L. Cooper, heard about the film project *Black and White* and reportedly went directly to Stalin via the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, V.M. Molotov.

His purpose was to object to the project, claiming it would damage the chances for Washington's recognition of Moscow. Cooper claimed that if the Soviets did not halt production of the film he would halt the construction of the Dnieprostroi Dam (the largest electrical power station in the world). The US Department of State monitored the film project, showing that there was concern over its development. On Hughes's part, he found the script he was to doctor to be untenable and decided to leave for a trip to Central Asia instead.

In terms of a Hollywood figure who visited the Soviet Union before and after recognition, Mary Pickford visited the USSR on two occasions. She first came to the Soviet Union in 1926 with Douglas Fairbanks and even appeared, amidst much fanfare, in the Soviet film *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*. Her second visit occurred in 1939, arriving from Scandinavia with her second husband in very different times and under very difficult

30 For a copy of the scenario, see *Krasnaia nov'* (1932), no. 8. See also 'Intermedia Projects' in http://www.surrey.ac.uk/lcts/lvmg/intermedia.html.

31 For a brief overview of Lubitsch's trip to Moscow, see Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 243–7. For an analysis of *Ninotchka* (1939), see the same source, pp. 265–75.

32 See Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume I 1902–1941: I, Too, Sing America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 242–75. See also Faith Berry, *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1983), pp. 154–71.

33 Concerning Mary Pickford's
second visit to the USSR in 1939,
there is a photograph of her at the
train station at the Krasnogorsk
photographic and documentary
film archive as well as a very short
article on the back page of an
issue of Kino-gazeta.

circumstances, one would imagine, given the conclusion of the Soviet-Nazi Pact of 1939.[33] It seems from these few examples that while many in the USA were keen to visit the USSR and to promote projects there, there was in fact little opportunity to do so. The 'window' opened by diplomatic recognition provided a few years of potential collaboration, but it seems that Soviet writers were keener to offer their work to Hollywood than the Soviet authorities were willing to initiate collaborations on Soviet soil. The major exception to this will be discussed in the following section, which deals with Boris Shumiatskii's attempts to use Hollywood as an economic model for the development of the Soviet film industry.

Boris Shumiatskii in Hollywood and his plans for a 'Soviet Hollywood'

In 1935 the head of the Soviet film industry, Boris Shumiatskii, undertook a technical film study, which eventually led to plans to construct a 'Soviet Hollywood' in the Crimea, with plans drawn up by American architects in 1936-7, at the height of the Great Purges. Richard Taylor explains his motivation, detailing how Shumiatskii wanted to learn from the West, in keeping with other spheres of Soviet industry in the 1930s. In the summer of 1935 he took a team of specialists on an investigative tour of Europe and America and met, amongst others, Capra and DeMille. [34] By 1935, however, Soviet–American cinema relations had soured, and Shumiatskii found himself the subject of Hollywood columnists' satire, as illustrated by this article entitled 'Russian Blank':

34 Richard Taylor, 'Ideology as mass
entertainment: Boris Shumyatsky
and Soviet Cinema of the 1930s',
in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie
(eds), Inside the Film Factory: New
Approaches to Russian and Soviet
Cinema (New York, NY:
Routledge, 1991), p. 213.

> Miss Mae West is 'of no great world significance' but Mr Mickey Mouse 'is of cosmic value' in the opinion of Comrade Boris Shumiatsky, director general of the Cinematography Industry of the USSR, now on a tour of study of the motion picture industry of America. In his opinion, the Russian people would not be interested in Miss West. The proletariat would not understand her, he feels, although he admits, just admits: 'the intelligentsia might know Mae West could exist, but they would not know why'. When Comrade Shumiatsky finds Mickey's whimsies cosmic, we are willing enough to agree, but when he denies for all the Russias and all the Russians a possibility of understanding that unsubtle something in the type that Miss West so ably delineates, we are again convinced that all the Soviet knows about machinery is said with tractors.[35]

35 The Billy Rose Theatre Collection,
Performing Arts Library, New York
Public Library. This appears to be a
short column from Motion Picture
Herald but is not labeled as such,
nor is the date of publication
noted.

Interestingly, this sarcastic article points to Shumiatskii's concern to learn cultural and economic lessons from Hollywood, a concern that is also demonstrated by material held in the Goskino archives. These contain an order to translate and publish (for internal use) a number of US film scripts, including *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), *Anna Karenina* (Clarence Brown, 1935) and *I'm No Angel* (Wesley Ruggles, 1933). Shumiatskii was therefore seriously interested in what

Hollywood films had to say to inform the future direction of the Soviet film industry. Yet his efforts to modernize were halted when he was executed in Stalin's Purges. While it is unclear as to exactly why this happened, the US press speculated in a scurrilous manner, its satiric tone indicative of the fact that after recognition, Soviet–American relations deteriorated. TIME Magazine, for example, under the headline 'Sexy Shumiatsky', carried the following account of the reasons for his demise, largely revolving around the release in 1938 of *Ostrov sokrovisch* (transliterated from the Russian and translated as *Treasure Island*):

> Robert Louis Stevenson never saw a moving picture. He might not have liked Hollywood's version of his *Treasure Island* (1934). But he would have had a fit at what somebody had done to his un-sexy story in the new Soviet film: transformed Cabin-boy Jim Hawkins into a pretty blonde (Jennie Hawkins). The guilty somebody was Boris Z. Shumiatsky, Will Hayes of the Soviet cinema industry. Last week Boris Shumiatsky was out of a job. Other charges against him: (1) that in attempting to freight 'a bourgeois adventure story' with significance he had introduced the Irish revolutionary movement without considering Karl Marx's letter of 1869 on the same subject; (2) had lured to the theater crowds of Soviet youngsters numerous enough 'to worry any pedagogue'; and (3) that his inefficiency, maladministration and attempts to 'out-Hollywood Hollywood' had caused a catastrophic slump in the Soviet film industry. [36]

It is likely that Shumiatskii's plans for a 'Soviet Hollywood' sealed his fate because they represented an interest in the USA that was deemed to be more and more inappropriate in a country that was turning towards isolationism. Peter Kenez notes that while the plans for a 'Soviet Hollywood' never materialized, there were technological advances during the 1930s. For instance, the Soviet cinema liberated itself from foreign products. In 1931 the first Soviet factory began to produce raw film and in 1934 portable sound projectors started to be produced. In addition, the Soviet Union began to make its own film cameras and studio lamps. New film studios opened in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Minsk; as a result of Soviet 'gigantomania', the studios in Moscow and Leningrad were among the largest in the world. As Kenez notes, despite all these advancements, Shumiatskii had even more ambitious plans:

> he wanted to imitate the Americans by building a Soviet Hollywood in the Crimea. In 1935, at a time when artistic contacts between the Soviet Union and the western world had become increasingly tenuous, he traveled to America to study the American industry. Like so many other plans of the period, the projected Soviet Hollywood never materialized. [37]

If we return to the central question posed in the title of this article – 'Could the Soviets really have infiltrated Hollywood?' – clearly all the

36 'Shumiatsky, Boris' file, TIME/Life newsclipping morgue, New York City.

37 Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (New York, NY: IB Tauris, 2001), p. 118.

Hollywood film projects planned, and then cancelled, posed no threat, even with the participation of the various Soviet Russian writers.

In their seminal study *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund contend that 'In Hollywood, the Communist Party did not play an important role until 1936'.[38] Indeed, there is no evidence that the Hollywood projects using the Soviet Union as background were motivated by Communist forces in Hollywood. When the Dies Committee, a Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities, created in 1938 to investigate Nazi and Bolshevik activities, examined Hollywood's alleged Communist personnel, it absolved everyone who had been mentioned by John Leech, an early Communist recruiter among the Hollywood community.[39] For the most part, as I have argued, these film projects were motivated by Hollywood's desire to 'recognize' the USSR in the context of debates surrounding diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, and were confined to particular individuals rather than representing a more extensive endorsement of the USSR by Hollywood personnel. The projects were not considered to be particularly controversial although, as we have seen, they could be halted for a variety of reasons which may have included fear of controversy. Yet even though Thalberg's project *Soviet* was cancelled by Mayer it would not have encountered difficulties with the censors. The Production Code Administration's file on *Soviet* gave MGM the 'go-ahead' and assigned the film a production number.

For a brief period in the early 1930s, Hollywood was therefore prepared not to be infiltrated but certainly to be entertained by the works and ideas of Soviet writers. The mutual fascination represented by these unrealized projects may nevertheless have had a longer-term impact. Hollywood's interest in the USSR was not confined to the period investigated in this article. The phase produced proto-collaborative projects that in retrospect can be seen as part of a longer trajectory that did not necessarily depend on good diplomatic relations between the two countries. Films with Soviet themes were produced in Hollywood when the USSR was an ally of Nazi Germany in 1939 (for example, *Ninotchka* [Ernst Lubitsch, 1939] and *Comrade X* [King Vidor, 1940]) as well as when the USA and the USSR were allies during World War II (for example, *Song of Russia* [Gregory Ratoff, 1944], *The North Star* [Lewis Milestone, 1943] and *Mission to Moscow* [Michael Curtiz, 1943]). While conventional histories reference these films, we can only speculate what the addition of the unmade projects including *Soviet*, *Red Square* and *Chocolate*, had they been produced, might have contributed to the genre of Soviet-themed films. Yet their existence as ideas that received serious consideration and in some cases went some way towards production provides a greater understanding of the complexities surrounding Soviet–American film relations before the Cold War.

From the National to the Transnational: European Film and Television in Transition, Humanities Research Centre, University of Warwick, 7 May 2005

JAMES BENNETT

As the conference title suggests, the aim was to explore recent developments in film and television that have increasingly located production, reception and textual factors outside the parameters, and borders, of the national. The conference was organized by University of Warwick postgraduates Iris Kleinecke and Anna Maria Mullally as part of the university's ongoing Humanities Research Centre postgraduate fellowships. As a one-day event, it attracted a fascinating and extremely strong lineup of international scholars.

Although texts under consideration generally came from the 1990s and 2000s, the approaches and contexts open to discussion were much broader. As a result, the breadth and complexity of the topic mitigated against a totally coherent and cohesive programme and outcome – indeed, perhaps the multidisciplinary and transnational approaches of the speakers themselves did not lend themselves to such coherence.

The day's opening panel quickly established the continuing importance of the national to the transnational. John Caughie opened proceedings with a detailed analysis of *Morven Callar* against its contextual background as a 'Scottish' film, funded by the Glasgow Film Fund, but cast with an (unexplained) English protagonist working as a (globally universal) shop-worker in the Highlands. Caughie questioned the relationship of 'national cinema' to 'art cinema', suggesting that it is the gap between the two where 'national art cinema' might lie. In a similar vein, Sarah Street's (University of Bristol) paper asked 'what is British cinema?' and 'what happens when it travels?'. She suggested that the designation 'British cinema' has a direct impact on branding, stereotyping and funding. However, as Street's paper went on to detail,

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1 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2 Tony Garnett, 'English and Media Centre interview with Tony Garnett: full transcript', Unit 3: Cops and the Box. URL: http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/ks4media.html and follow link to Teachers Notes.

3 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 206.

the importance of the transnational could equally disrupt the national. Her research into European funding of 'British cinema' suggested that such funding could comprise the making of national cinema – a transnational possibility that has to be negotiated. The (un)ascertainability of national specificity in classifying a text's national base remained a recurrent theme through the day. Dina Iordonova (University of St Andrews) suggested that *Dust* (Milcho Manchevski, 2001), a film tagged as a Balkan Western set in Macedonia, could equally have been regarded as British for its funding structure. Similarly, Tim Bergfelder (University of Southampton), in rejecting the notion of 'accented cinema' established by Hamid Naficy, suggested that Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand/Head On* (2004) was positioned, transnationally, across Turkish, German and English influences.[1]

As Glen Creeber's (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) discussion of various nations' dramatic output suggested, the theme of the national was, whilst inseparable from issues of the transnational, nevertheless worthy of sustained and close attention. Creeber's paper addressed recent 'monument drama' from the UK, Denmark and Germany, pointing out (in response to Caughie's earlier work) that the increasing concern with micro-politics and politics of the self did not diminish the importance of the national. His insightful analysis of *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, 1996), *Riget/The Kingdom* (Lars von Trier, 1994) and *Heimat* (Edgar Reitz, 1984) demonstrated how, in Tony Garnett's terms, these soap-opera-like programmes acted as 'Trojan horse dramas', speaking to issues of the nation through the personalization and personification of such issues.[2] However, as Creeber remarked in relation to *The Kingdom*, the 'trashy *ER*-style sequence reminds us that this had to be sold to Denmark, with an eye on the global', noting the inseparability of the two. Or, as Caughie has commented in a passage that suggests the speakers are closer on issues of the transnational than their debate on 'monument television' suggests, 'from the necessity of the national to the demands of the international'.[3]

This second theme, of the European and the national in relation to the global, was addressed by Farrell Corcoran (Dublin City University), who placed the European television landscape in the context of an increasingly globalized television industry. Describing current trends in Eastern European television broadcasting, Corcoran suggested that the development of both neoliberalism and public service broadcasting in the newly emergent states in this region acted as a kind of 'strong globalization' force, akin to cultural imperialism. Similarly, Sarah Cardwell's (University of Kent) discussion of the adaptation of American novels, *Portrait of a Lady* (Jane Campion, 1996) and *House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000), positioned European filmmaking within a global context. Neatly unpicking the influence of European production contexts from the demands of representing national identities, Cardwell's paper established how the European context had resulted in a focus on particular aspects of the novels in the process of adaptation. She argued

that the films paid greater attention to issues of class and produced a representation of American national identity that reflected European concerns.

Different ideas of the local were expressed elsewhere, most directly by Laura Rascaroli (University College, Cork). However, it was clear from Iordanova's discussion of Balkan filmmaking and reception, as well as Bergfelder's argument regarding the failure of Fatih Akin's work to find a 'homeland', that the importance of local conditions was apparent not only in production and reception but within the texts themselves. Iordanova's paper was particularly striking in its account of how a local, Balkan Western, *Dust*, did not conform to the two transnational promotional paradigms of 'Balkan exotica' or 'moving rendering of the political situation in Macedonia'. As Rascaroli asserted, the importance of the local was in its ability to express the transnational. Her discussion of Robert Guédiguian's films suggested that it was by avoiding overt reference to the national, and concentrating on southern French localities, that the focus comes to be on the transnational. He is thus able to depict the loss of roots and communal identity, rapid change and the development of non-space that are so often associated with the flux of peoples, goods, services and industries brought about by closer transnational relations in a global world.

The day produced some extremely useful debates and directions for future scholarship. Most particularly, the conference organizers should be praised for a final session round-table discussion, chaired by Professor Richard Dyer (University of Warwick), which allowed the day's major themes to be addressed by the speakers and the room collectively. The rewarding debate from this session suggested not only that the field could profit from more multi-disciplinary and comparative approaches, but also that such final session discussions might be deployed usefully at more academic conferences.

Despite the wide range of papers presented, arguably three major and generally inter-connected themes emerged over the course of the conference. Firstly, it opened up the issue of the national, as a production, analytical and textual category. In particular, as Dyer suggested in the final session, the conference raised the question of the usefulness of the 'national' as a discursive framework for analysis. As Dyer rightly said, in many senses the most important aspect of texts such as the Hammer Horror Frankenstein productions was 'whether they frightened!', rather than their national identity, representation or 'Europeanness'. Secondly, the conference addressed the impact of the global on the European. This second issue questioned how increased globalization might be traced not only in production and reception, but also within the texts themselves. Finally, and as a counterpoint to the more expansive transnational issues that these two themes raised, various speakers also asserted the importance of the local as an important and relevant category. Rascaroli's discussion of Robert Guédiguian's cinema placed the local as a fundamentally indispensable category in understanding the influence of

4   Kevin Robbins, 'What in the world
    is going on?', in Paul du Gay (ed.),
    *Production of Culture/Cultures of
    Production* (London: Sage
    Publications, 1997).

the transnational, particularly in relation to defining the national. To this end, the conference speakers were to varying degrees concerned with what has been termed elsewhere the 'global–local' nexus, accounting for the inflections and various idiosyncrasies that national and local conditions put on the increasingly globalized film and television industries, audiences and studies.[4]

These three overarching themes coalesced in the final session discussion around the question of the use of the term 'transnational' to describe the current shifts in European film and television. Arriving at the conference, an obvious question for any attendee was why the 'transnational' and not, for instance, the 'international' or 'global'? This question became more important as the day progressed, with the terms 'globalization' and 'transnational' being used interchangeably by some speakers and differentially by others. Whilst the very term 'transnational' worried some speakers, its usefulness for thinking beyond the boundaries of the national was widely asserted. As Street suggested, the term 'transnational' allows the transcending of the national but is also suggestive of the inability of film, television and other fields of academic study to 'get rid of the national altogether', which might be 'residual, but "really" experienced' by producers, consumers and theorists.

The implications of using 'transnational' rather than 'international' or 'globalization' in the conference title also became apparent in this final session. Whilst the prefix 'inter' suggested something 'between' nations, the panel's discussion of 'trans' proposed that it more helpfully connoted ideas of 'across' nations, rather than 'above'. Bergfelder was quick to point out that its choice in place of 'globalization' might largely be about removing the negative, top-down connotations of globalization. Whilst this indeed might be a useful aspect of the term, the use of 'transnational' here also evacuates some of the important debates that have occurred around globalization, in particular those that demonstrate the hybrid, uneven and everyday aspects of globalization such as the debates around a global–local nexus in cultural studies. As Iordanova observed, that the term is not readily defined and reducible to one set of debates requires the field to do some 'soul-searching' before its full usefulness is apparent. This conference went a long way towards establishing its worth.

By way of conclusion I shall return to Caughie's opening paper. He suggested that it might have been called 'The Angel's Share'. This was a reference to the term used in Scotland's whisky industry to describe the inevitable loss of whisky through evaporation due to the inability to seal completely the distillation casks. At present, the precise meaning of the term 'transnational' is similarly unable to be sealed within its hermeneutic confines. However, rather than a total evaporation, the term's leakage here is suggestive of how it might 'float' above and across boundaries, usefully providing a critical lexicon for those debates that cannot be reduced or confined to the national.

'Some people are disappointed to only get the film....' What is a DVD?, Humanities Research Centre, University of Warwick, 23 April 2005

JAMES WALTERS

The meteoric rise of DVD has fundamentally reshaped the worldwide distribution and reception of film and television. Attractions such as superior audio/visual quality, greater product durability and the growing plethora of extra features available have contributed to the dramatic shift away from video, establishing DVD as the technology of choice in contemporary society. The dominance of the disc is such that high-street stores are gradually phasing out the sale of VCRs, so with the growing affordability of DVD recorders the ascendancy of DVD inevitably heralds the death of video. Since DVD has become impossible to ignore, this one-day international symposium, organized by James Bennett and Tom Brown (University of Warwick), offering sustained and varied analysis of the phenomenon was well timed.

Barbara Klinger's (Indiana University) opening plenary provided a succinct mapping of the DVD market in the USA highlighting that, with 75% of North American homes owning DVD players by 2004, DVD is the fastest-growing technology in history. Indeed, titles such as the 2001 releases *Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua) and *The Fast and the Furious* (Rob Cohen) exemplify how many films now make greater revenue through DVD rental and purchase than through cinema release. Klinger also drew attention to matters such as the relatively low manufacturing cost of DVDs (about one dollar per disc) and the integration of DVD with other technologies, such as the CD and the home computer/games console, further explaining the format's supremacy. Plotting the rapid emergence of DVD within a wider context, Klinger detailed the ways in which DVD draws upon existing technologies and previous film-watching cultures. For example, DVD appeals to a culture of cinephilia

developed from the 1950s onwards and particularly prevalent among college students and art cinema audiences. The format provides a non-theatrical context for this connoisseurship and high-quality access to titles outside of the multiplex mainstream in the same way that Laserdisc technology attempted to in the 1980s. Thus DVD evokes and simultaneously modifies that short-lived previous technology (which, we might remember, featured ten-inch discs that had to be turned over like LPs) whilst resurrecting a traditional public film culture, potentially expanding cineliteracy amongst viewers.

Yet Klinger also detailed the ways in which DVD has reshaped audiences' evaluative criteria, culminating in the concept of 'The Perfect DVD Movie'. As DVD technology is synonymous with technical quality, advancement and innovation, so audience perceptions incorporate not only the more traditional narrative appreciation but also a critique of increasingly prominent technical aspects such as sound quality. This shift results in films like *Last Man Standing* (Walter Hill, 1996) being applauded for its achievements in sound despite its 'nonsensical' plot, whilst *Annie Hall*'s (Woody Allen, 1977) sound is derided as 'nothing to shout about'. Klinger's elucidation of these shifting value boundaries exemplified the extent to which the criteria for achievement has been transformed as a result of DVD technology, and the ways in which films that might traditionally be perceived as failures can now potentially succeed. Likewise, films are criticized for not taking advantage of DVD technology, with *Annie Hall*'s limited-choice 'Luddite' menu screen comparing poorly with the rich, exhaustive cohesion of *Terminator 2*'s multi-layered, multi-choice menu 'world' which rewards viewer interaction, or the 'easter eggs' hidden in *The Matrix* menu screens that play on viewer curiosity. Significantly, the gadgetry associated with these latter menu screens, and intrinsic to DVD's promoted hi-tech format, appeals mainly to a male audience, leading Klinger to conclude that DVD is, and continues to be, 'a man's world'.

Glyn Davis (Edinburgh College of Art) intended to interrogate some of those masculine biases as he explored the impact of DVD among queer audiences. Davis explained the extent to which the DVD market has increased queer consumers' accessibility to previously hard-to-find titles, as traditionally underground material appears, tastefully packaged, replete with extra features. As DVD makes the hard-to-find readily available, straight-to-DVD titles such as *Leeches!* (David DeCoteau, 2003) are sought out and reclaimed by queer audiences. Interestingly, Davis's focus on straight-to-DVD releases addressed in part an earlier suggestion of Klinger's that these titles, previously neglected as straight-to-video, could provide a lost continent for film studies. In the same session, Steven Allen (University of Warwick) also attended to questions of audience when analyzing the highly effective strategy of Pixar Animation Studios to transcend child/adult divides in their 'family-centred' DVD marketing. Allen's argument revolved around the title *Monsters Inc.* (Peter Docter, 2001) as he illustrated that the design and

layout of product packaging and extra features effectively indexed the studio's dual marketing approach. Expanding upon this, he detailed Pixar's self-promotion in the extra features, particularly the ways in which the studio is represented to resemble the monsters' workplace in the film: full of fun and magic but also a corporation with no single authorial figure. Finally, Allen drew attention to the restrained use of digital effects in the extra features, which echoes the studio's self-proclaimed emphasis on story over spectacle.

In the next session, Isaac Mace-Tessler (University of East Anglia) maintained an emphasis upon menus and extra features as he examined the cohesion between aspects of visual style within the film *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001) and the multitudinous option screens that surround it on the DVD release. Following this, Jo T. Smith (University of Auckland) broadened the terms of the debate by highlighting DVD's hybrid status as a form encapsulating and incorporating both 'old' and 'new' technologies. So, whilst the interactivity of DVD is tied into the modern uses of new media in everyday life, discs are also marketed as valuable and collectible, thus evoking the functions and pleasures of books, an old technology, as well as mimicking their size and form. Smith's argument stressed the complicated status of DVD and usefully reintroduced Klinger's theme of media convergence which, as Charlotte Brunsdon (University of Warwick) observed, continues to present new challenges for the academy.

The final session contained two papers yielding insights into the production of DVD material. Ginette Vincendeau (University of Warwick) gave a lively and informative account of authoring and performing a commentary for DVD. The paper drew attention to matters such as timing, vocal pace, silence and the balance of description and analysis, which are crucial to a process that possesses no firm guidelines for authors. In addition, Vincendeau noted the general uncertainty concerning who actually uses DVD commentaries and speculated upon the potential role of those commentaries within academic teaching. In a counterpart paper, Caroline Millar (British Film Institute) outlined the BFI's commitment to quality DVD extras, emphasizing their educative role in providing viewers with background knowledge of difficult or unfamiliar texts. Potentially, such extras enrich the viewing experience, offering rigorously researched commentary of films in a form more accessible than the written word. Crucially, Millar stressed that all extra features can be selected or ignored at the touch of a button, and that the BFI strives to construct menus and features that are non-invasive and are complementary to the film itself, suggesting a significant audience may exist which refrains from interacting with the extras. Placed alongside these two related papers, Catherine Grant (University of Kent) considered the status of the film author in the DVD universe. Grant particularly emphasized the re-exertion of the director's influence in extra features such as documentaries, interviews and commentaries, so that DVDs become 'auteur machines' which not only reinforce auteur

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status but also *create* auteurs. Attention was paid to the creation of auteurs in this process where justification hardly exists, with the (rapidly released) director's cut of *King Arthur* (Antoine Fuqua, 2004) cited as a case in point. More generally, it was observed that switching on commentary transforms watching the film as fiction into watching the film as a documentary, thus signposting questions of authorship. Yet Grant was careful to note that extra features are also a promotion of the product, detailing some of the ways in which more problematic details regarding a film can be omitted from or avoided in commentaries, interviews and documentaries, thus constructing a definite marketable viewpoint. Likewise, the elevation of the author in DVD releases can ultimately be read as a particular kind of marketing itself.

Exploring this theme of studio marketing further, John T. Caldwell (UCLA) delivered the symposium's closing plenary, situating the emergence of DVD extra features within the historical context of promotional strategies used widely in television since the 1940s. Particularly, Caldwell drew attention to electronic press kits (EPKs) which are issued to broadcast media in the same way that print media are given press packs of images and texts. EPKs typically consist of bundled features such as behind-the-scenes footage, making-of documentaries and interviews that can be easily integrated into media broadcasts (with correspondents editing in their questions to pre-recorded answers, for example). EPKs are used by studios to manage their publicity through spin, ensuring that the broadcast media promulgate homogenized viewpoints and messages. Much of the content of EPKs then reappears as DVD extra features, and so the studio's promotion of itself is reasserted, being repackaged and effectively sold back to the consumer. Caldwell's paper challenged the oft-articulated distinctions between analogue and digital media, illustrating the extent to which long-established promotional strategies are worked into the DVD product, highlighting television history as not merely a precursor to DVD but a prototype of it. Furthermore, his focus upon studios' manipulative promotional tactics provoked energetic responses, leaving some audience members contemplating whether media studies itself in fact 'feeds the marketing machine'. Caldwell's response to this was more positive, as he stressed that analyzing products outside of their intended context can only strengthen an understanding of the propaganda strategies at work.

By posing the question 'What is a DVD?', the symposium organizers succeeded in providing a wide scope for discussion and debate, evidenced in the breadth of papers described here. Variety did not equal disparity, however, as significant interrelations emerged among the papers given, culminating in a coherent investigation of the issues at stake. Throughout the day, delegates considered the value and function of DVD within the academic context, perhaps encouraged by Helen Wheatley's (University of Reading) early assertion that extra features such as commentaries, documentaries and interviews can sometimes 'shut down' opportunities for proper analysis and research of film and

television. This stimulated debate regarding the risks of these features being used as apparently direct and ready-made answers to questions of intention and meaning in the texts. Caldwell's emphasis on DVD extra features as part of a wider marketing strategy underlined precisely why such material should not be taken at face value. Whether or not we ultimately view DVD as a wholly positive development, the symposium successfully illustrated the ways in which its emergence has fundamentally reshaped film and television, resulting in phenomena such as that described by Victor Perkins (University of Warwick) whereby 'some people are disappointed to only get the film'.

**Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past.*
London: British Film Institute, 2004, 188 pp.**

ALISON BUTLER

Contemporary Costume Film has a stronger thesis than its title betrays,
tracing an array of spatial themes through recent examples of the genre
by means of a variety of topographical critical approaches. 'It is an odd
choice', Pidduck notes in her concluding remarks, 'to use spatial rather
than temporal concepts to address the cinematic past' (p. 176), but a
choice which is justified, she claims, by the 'presentist' preoccupations
of contemporary costume drama. In the first half of the book, 'The spaces
of costume drama', Pidduck deploys Deleuze's concept of the
movement-image and Bakhtin's chronotope along with the spatial
theories of Henri Lefebvre in order to isolate and analyze key motifs and
themes such as the woman at the window, the writing desk and the letter,
the ball, the country walk and the trip to Europe. The second part of the
book, 'Costume drama reassembled', shows how revisionist costume
films rearticulate these recurrent tropes from progressive perspectives.
Pidduck describes her approach as 'not a method per se, but a way of
thinking about film through the ideas of space and movement' (p. 14).
This is a pragmatic and open approach, designed to promote imaginative
interpretative connections between aesthetic forms and social realities.
   Two telling ironies ensue from the description of recent costume
dramas in terms of movement-images. First, as Pidduck notes,
assumptions about the historical depth of the genre are undercut. The
pasts in which these films are set are generally not conceptualized
temporally, as part of continuous duration, but spatially, as other worlds
or at least stages, hence the 'theme park' critique often levelled at the
heritage film. Pidduck argues that it is precisely in their postmodern lack
of historicity that these mannered and reflexive microcosms function as

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'a limited theatre of action that amplifies a nuanced boudoir politics' of the present (p. 6). Second, because the movement-image subordinates time to space it privileges action, and yet in the conventional costume drama female characters generally lack agency (as Austen adaptations in particular frequently stress in their emphasis on the dire consequences of the failure to marry). In nostalgic and male-centred costume films, such as *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993), this disposition subtends the figure of the woman as infinitely receding object of desire, but in feminist adaptations such as *The Portrait of a Lady* (Jane Campion, 1996), *Washington Square* (Agnieszka Holland, 1997), and *The House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000), it creates an almost oxymoronic situation, reminiscent of the Hollywood woman's film of the 1940s, in which the central characters appear to struggle for survival against the very fabric of the text. As Pidduck notes: 'The (feminist) protagonists of *Square*, *Mirth* and *Portrait* struggle physically and psychologically within the grip of constraining Victorian costumery and tangled milieux; these scenic elements themselves signify a complex series of sexual, social and economic obstacles' (p. 72). The spatial tropes of *Contemporary Costume Film* thus support a sustained meditation on generic transformation, as in the example of the house of fiction, which functions as a trap for female characters and a site of contest for feminist auteurs.

A more unreservedly Deleuzian analysis might have deployed the notion of the impulse-image as a way of looking at the relationship between the female protagonist of the costume film and her milieu. Deleuze talks about an image which is 'somehow "stuck" between the affection-image and the action-image (between degenerate affect and embryonic action)'.[1] Like action-images, impulse-images occupy real geographical and social milieux, but unlike them, they 'communicate from within with originary worlds'.[2] The concept of the impulse-image makes sense of a film like *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993) and offers the possibility of wider insights into the ambiguous relationship between historical setting and contemporary narration in the costume film. On the other hand, Pidduck's wariness of over-commitment to Deleuzian critique enables her to side-step Deleuze's eccentric equation of the impulse-image with naturalism, while her more generally cultural interpretation of figures of interiority and exteriority, mobility and stasis brings her to broadly similar conclusions on the relationship between setting and affect in these films. Although, as Pidduck stresses, Deleuze's thought is not the major focus of this book, it can certainly be read as a very useful contribution to the ongoing negotiations between feminism and Deleuzian film theory, as much for the incompatibilities it reveals as for the sympathies.

The two-part structure of the book also invites consideration of the possibility that the distinction between conventional and revisionist costume drama might have been mapped onto Deleuze's schematic division of film history between the movement-image and the time-image. Instead, Pidduck offers a rather more ingenious

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986), p. 134.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

interpretation of revisionist costume film as postmodern movement-image. Part Two begins with a consideration of the innovative construction of space and time in *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992) and *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991), in the service of a 'radical past', in Fredric Jameson's phrase. However, despite its celebrated temporal scope, Pidduck argues that *Orlando* is less a historical text than a postmodern feminist allegory of the historical trajectory of the white bourgeois subject. Rather than being prohibited from action, Tilda Swinton's langorous Orlando simply disengages from it, positioning him/herself as a witness to the theatricalized historical tableaux which compose the film. The untenability of this passive position in the context of a colonial encounter marks the historical limitations of the white bourgeois feminist tradition from which the film emerges. In *Daughters of the Dust*, on the other hand, a variety of temporal and historical modes mesh together in themes of memory and futurity embodied by the film's dense and complex semiotics. *Daughters* stands alone here as a costume film which belongs to the cinema of the time-image, perhaps because it is firmly embedded in the traditions of the African disapora and belongs therefore to the minor cinema of 'the people to come'. In its later chapters, the book's focus moves away from spatial themes and towards questions of performativity, theatricalization and the body. Chapters on the new class consciousness of films such as *Gosford Park* (Robert Altman, 2001) and *Angels and Insects* (Philip Haas, 1995), and queer costume films including *Caravaggio* (Derek Jarman, 1986) and *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997), stress irony and performativity as transformative textual strategies, embracing the supposed superficiality of the costume film and allying it with Lyotard's notion of a generative postmodernism. The final chapter, on the body in costume film, brings Pidduck's argument to an interesting conclusion. Rather than following Deleuze in interpreting mirroring and theatricality through the concept of the virtual and the time-image, she argues that the most significant effect of their postmodern play on performance is that the doubled textuality creates a space for the actual corporeality of the actors to erupt sensuously into these period pieces.

The question of the costume film's generic provenance crops up briefly in the book's introduction, where Pidduck links it to 'the international resurgence of art cinema' (p. 9). This point is refined in her discussion of 'the idea of Europe', in which she describes most costume films as 'crossover products . . . or popular cinema . . . rather than art film' which popularize expectations associated with European art film (p. 92). Television series or films with television money invested in them are referenced throughout the book, and clearly form a significant part of the genre's history. On the whole, these questions lie outside the scope of this study, with its contemporary and thematic focus, but the brief references made to the history and definition of costume film tantalize with the possibility that further investigation in this direction might have produced additional insights into the culture's investment in these doll's

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house fictions. The book's topographical critique *locates* costume film, forging connections between the genre's pocket-sized politics and the wider geopolitics which are often elided by the films and their admirers. What it does best is explain, with a typically Deleuzian attention to films as sensuous, kinetic, cinematic objects, *how* costume films convey a 'structure of feeling'. Prudently, perhaps, it avoids too much speculation about the causes of the current revival of costume film and its strange new function as a (post)feminist public sphere. *Contemporary Costume Film* brims with subtle and inventive arguments which contribute significantly to several different fields within film studies. Lucid and elegantly written, the book wears its scholarship lightly enough to appeal to undergraduate students as well as scholars.

Alastair Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light: Emigre Filmmakers in Paris 1929–1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004, 253 pp.

WENDY EVERETT

Paris in the 1930s was a maelstrom of conflict and difference: issues of nationality, identity, history, politics, class and power were all being (re)negotiated, and the city itself was the site of political, cultural and social schisms whose repercussions are still discernible today. Perhaps nowhere are the conflicts of this turbulent decade more vividly revealed than in its cinema: struggling to make the transition from silent to sound, with all the attendant financial, artistic and technological problems; moving away from the experimental avant-garde productions of the 1920s towards a more engaged form of filmic 'realism'; adapting to a new position within a Europe in which threats of domination emanated from both Hollywood and the highly successful studios of Germany, while struggling to absorb an unprecedented influx of emigre filmmakers attracted to Paris by its reputation for religious and artistic tolerance.

Alistair Phillips's wide-ranging and thoughtful study, *City of Darkness, City of Light* considers this turbulent moment in French history through the work of those filmmakers who, threatened by the increasingly hostile policies of the Third Reich, were forced to abandon their successful careers in Berlin and flee to Paris. Some of these figures are now legendary; others remain obscure despite, as Phillips demonstrates, their not inconsiderable contribution to contemporary film. A number of them, such as Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder, were just passing through, with Paris serving as a mere 'waiting room', a place of temporary refuge on a longer journey towards the even brighter lights of Hollywood.[1] Others, including such influential figures as Robert Siodmak and Victor Trivas, chose to settle in Paris for several years, becoming to all intents an integral part of the domestic filmmaking scene.

1 Thomas Elsaesser, 'The German emigrees in Paris during the 1930s: pathos and leavetaking', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 53, no. 4 (1984), pp. 278–83.

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By choosing to focus in particular on the various ways in which Paris itself was represented and referenced in their work, Phillips explores and reassesses the contribution to cinema history of this relatively small group of emigre filmmakers. Amongst the multiple questions that fascinate him are the ways in which their films engage directly with traditional myths surrounding the cultural representation of Paris, both reinforcing and, at the same time, subverting them by dint of their own very different experiences and viewpoints. In this way, Phillips seeks to demonstrate that the very identity of French 'national' cinema was fundamentally modified by the work of the emigre filmmakers in the 1930s in ways that would have far-reaching cultural, social, and political implications.

While the relationship between cinema and the urban spaces of the modern city has long been the focus of critical studies, and while Paris itself is repeatedly foregrounded in such works, Phillips is, by his own admission, less interested in Paris's function as a metaphorical text than in establishing its identity within a more specifically grounded historical perspective which includes social, economic, political and cultural factors. This approach governs the book's overall structure, with short case studies and accounts of specific films and filmmakers being painstakingly situated within a detailed historical, political, and social context. Topics covered in the introduction and the second chapter, 'The City in Context' – significantly, the longest of all the chapters – clearly indicate these priorities, and include, for example, historical accounts of the volatile relations between France and Germany, and of immigration patterns in Paris since the eighteenth century. The cultural and political ideologies of Paris and Berlin are compared and contrasted, since their very different understanding of questions such as the urban/rural divide and the identity of the city, and their opposed attitudes to memory and the past, will provide useful background for later discussion of individual films.

The third chapter, 'City of Light', highlights the mythical status of Paris as spectacle, citing *Mauvaise graine* (Billy Wilder, 1933), *La Crise est finie* (Robert Siodmak, 1934) and *La Vie Parisienne* (Robert Siodmak, 1935) as examples of emigre films that appear to confirm and celebrate Paris as 'site of cosmopolitan belonging' (p. 74). Amongst the origins of this mythical version of Paris, Phillips includes Haussmann's redevelopment of the city in the nineteenth century, and he shows how the newly incarnated city was used to market a particular view of Paris to the outside world: the city of light and enlightenment, of specularity and progress. Perhaps not surprisingly, the following chapter, 'City of Darkness', presents us with alternative myths: the night-time spaces of the city, the spaces of fear, crime, and threatening sexuality. Ironically, this darker side of Paris had been directly glimpsed by many of the emigres when their arrival in the 'tolerant' city of their dreams was greeted with open hostility and protectionist attempts to limit the work available to them. Moreover, Phillips argues, this alternative mythology

of Paris also chimed well with their Germanic cultural understanding of urban space as inherently threatening and evil. In their treatment of this 'other' Paris, therefore, emigre filmmakers found scope to use their particular skills in lighting, set design, and staging (whose origins lay in the Expressionist films of the 1920s) in ways that would directly lead to many of the stylistic traits later identified as characteristic of Poetic Realism. Examples of films in which such features can be identified include, *Coeur des lilas* (Anatole Litvak, 1931), *Dans les rues* (Victor Trivas, 1933), and *Carrefour* (Kurt Bernhardt, 1938). If Paris is *both* city of darkness *and* of light, its identity must be recognized as ambivalent, and the book goes on to consider representations of this essential ambivalence in two key films of the period: *Pièges* (Robert Siodmak, 1939), and *Liliom* (Fritz Lang, 1934). Close analysis of particular scenes and images in these films enables Phillips to suggest a number of ways in which they were able to foster ambivalence and instability within their narrative structure, not least through their somewhat subversive treatment of male stars (Maurice Chevalier and Charles Boyer), who were traditionally perceived by the public as incarnating very specific notions of French or Parisian identity. The book concludes with a brief examination of journey narratives in relation to exilic filmmaking, and considers the significance of nostalgia and self referentiality within these 1930s films. It contains a number of short case studies of figures such as the producer Erich Pommer and the directors Robert Siodmak and Kurt Courant, and analyzes different aspects of a range of films including *Coeur des lilas, Mauvaise graine, Dans les rues, La Crise est finie* (Robert Siodmak, 1934), and *La Vie Parisienne* (Robert Siodmak, 1935). Appendices detail cast lists, plot synopses and press reviews of some fifteen films, and there is a filmography and an extensive bibliography.

City of Darkness, City of Light has been carefully researched, and combines detailed factual information with wide-ranging cultural reference. In situating emigre films of the 1930s within their wider social and political context, the book acts as a useful reference tool, while its focus on emigre filmmakers provides a new take on an otherwise well-researched period, and draws attention to a group of films that have so often been ignored in studies of French cinema. The book is published at a time when other previously neglected areas of film production (including set design, costume and lighting, for example) are being reevaluated, and it establishes a number of useful links between such elements and more traditional concerns. Moreover, its central thesis, that many of the characteristics traditionally associated with French national cinema, particularly the films of the Poetic Realist movement, may well have originated in a different tradition of filmmaking altogether, is both persuasive and important. Phillips succeeds in creating a width of vision that is rare in film studies, and by juxtaposing apparently divergent ideas, periods and events he occasionally reveals unexpected and exciting connections.

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One of the problems inherent in this approach, however, is a general lack of theoretical coherence that is not compensated for by the somewhat forced light/dark metaphor that runs throughout. While major critical and theoretical texts are referenced, this tends to be almost in passing, and some of the critical and analytical observations suffer as a result. The book can be frustrating in other ways as well, given that its attempt to deal with so many ideas and subjects means that few can receive quite the attention they deserve. Key landmarks, whether space or decor, popular song or mise-en-scene, reception or performance, stardom or identity jostle for our attention on the journey but, as with much tourism, we have little time to stop and explore. Furthermore, examples offered for our inspection are inevitably partial, and their status as evidence may sometimes seem flawed.

However, while it might have been fascinating to explore a number of ideas in greater detail, and to have found a tighter and more coherent theoretical focus, it is in fact the case that the strength of this book is elsewhere. By dipping in and out of different theoretical, historical and critical views, and by tightly juxtaposing filmic and non-filmic concepts and events, the ultimate achievement of *City of Darkness, City of Light* may well be to encourage readers to explore further down paths they might not otherwise have discovered. And, above all, the value of this book lies in its passionate attempt to highlight the importance of a whole range of films that might otherwise have been forgotten.

Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde*. London: Verso, 2002, 344 pp.

HELEN STODDART

Although Sergei Eisenstein features on the front cover of Esther Leslie's book, performing his famous handshake with Mickey Mouse outside the Disney Studios in Hollywood, the real star of the volume is Walter Benjamin, whose fascination with and hopes for animation dominate the first half of the book, and who haunts the terms of much of the subsequent reflection. Esther Leslie is now an established and formidable scholar of Walter Benjamin's work and she has styled her book in an extremely engaging prose style that crackles with wit and lively phrasing in a way that seems to tune into the forceful and inventive energies of what she sees as the best animation. Although Benjamin's writings on animation were slender, in the first two chapters of the book Leslie draws out early animation's appeal and promise for theorists (including Benjamin) and practitioners of the modern who 'knew that the modern city could only be represented by harnessing and interrogating its latest technologies, photography, film, montage and the reanimation of reality' (p. 75). This work traces the modernist appeal of comic animation such as *Felix the Cat* (1927) with its 'little strips of bouleversing logic and order' that 'rebuff so ferociously painterly realism and filmic naturalism' and are 'set inside a universe of transformation, overturning and provisionality' (p. vi); it also draws out illuminating links between these essential aesthetics and the principles of various other contemporary modernist practices such as Dada ('an absurd art of trash', p. 34), Constructivism ('mechanized vitality', p. 52) and Futurism ('kinetic', 'storyless', embodying 'dramas of disproportion', p. 39).

Across these two chapters Leslie also suggests a telling affinity between Benjamin and early animation which starts on a concrete level

with his fascination with fairytale, myth and children's toys, but also
extends (sometimes to the point of overstretching) to become a metaphor
both for understanding some of his most famous writings and moments
of his life. For example, much is made in the book of the intrinsically
negative dialectics on which animation is based: 'Cartooning is made up
of frames and what happens "in between", between each frame'. In
animation the process of 'endless deletion ... leads not to nothingness
but to movement' through the mechanism of the 'obliteration of the
previous cel' (p. 33). Thus, encrypted in Benjamin's 1940 discussion of
Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* is an allusion to the angels in Talmudic
legend who were 'created anew in every moment in countless hordes, in
order to cease to be once they have sung their hymn to God, dissolving
back into nothingness' (p. 60). Benjamin himself is described as escaping
Berlin for Moscow in 1927 where he is 'brought back to life again' in a
city where the revolution has turned all life into a process of perpetual
rebirth.

One of the striking things that emerges from Esther Leslie's excellent
account of the relation between animation and the theory and practice of
modernism, however, is the way that she manages to draw out a strong
sense of the characters of the main players involved in the debates. The
ironic result – though it is a welcome one – is that she manages to inject
a sense of voice and personality, even of drama, into the debates and
disputes between members and associates of the Frankfurt School over
the radical political potential of animated film; this potential, however, is
one that hinges precisely on the way that early animation is free of what
is seen as a bourgeois attachment to 'narrative and personality-fixated
dramas' (p. 113). Instead, and especially for Benjamin, cartoons draw
attention to their own flatness and two-dimensionality – their graphic
continuity with drawing and writing rather than photography – while at
the same time chaotically and fantastically acting out the destruction or
warping of all the laws of physics that govern the material world.
Cartoons, therefore, were 'object lessons in the actuality of alienation'
(p. 83).

Perhaps the most fascinating example of this intellectual
characterization emerges in Leslie's account of the process of
Benjamin's redrafting of 'The work of art in the age of its technical
reproducibility' which began in its first draft (1935) with a section titled
'Mickey Mouse' but which ended up in its third and final draft (1936)
without it, following what Leslie describes as a 'drama of footnotes'
(p. 118) between Benjamin and Adorno, with Horkheimer chipping in on
the second version. In his first version Benjamin had argued that
industrial 'technicization' had also produced the 'possibility of a of a
psychic inoculation against mass psychoses through certain films' such
as 'American funnies and the Disney films' (p. 111) which 'effect a
therapeutic explosion of the unconscious' and in which the 'pre-emptive
and curative outbreak of such mass psychoses is represented by
collective laughter' (p. 110). The point of dispute was that, whereas the

'ever optimistic' Benjamin saw positive potential in what Leslie terms a 'film tendency' that 'acknowledged, mocked and re-worked' (p. 112) the 'technological apparatus' faced everyday by the masses through a technological medium that abstracted and transcended it, Adorno, 'suspicious of film in general', hoped to 'cast a dark shadow over Disney and over the mimetic capability' (p. 117). He is depicted as grumbling pessimistically in the background of Benjamin's second edition about the way mass culture corrupts and co-opts into, rather than releases from, violence, and the way that 'Mickey's magic magics away the urgency of social transformation' (p. 118). Clearly Adorno's gloom held sway over the third edition as Benjamin abandoned the Mickey Mouse section altogether, though in what is presented as an explicit and deliberately 'recalcitrant act against Adorno' (p. 119), Benjamin thumbed his nose at him by beefing up the Brechtian influence on his argument since Adorno had always a particular distaste for what he regarded as Benjamin's 'Brechtian hooliganism' (p. 177).

In parallel with this and other critical debates Leslie presents a precise and revealing study of the development of animation, starting briefly with Robertson's magic lantern shows in Paris in 1797 and the thaumatrope, phenakistoscope and zoetrope in the nineteenth century, but focusing on the first three decades of the twentieth century beginning with the line and dot-based phantasmagoric animations of Emile Cohl (*Phantasmagorie*, 1908) and J. Stuart Blackton (*The Haunted House*, 1906) and proceeding to the final dismissal of Disney's 'ever rounder' and 'sugar-sweet' (p. 295) films of the1950s such as *Cinderella* (1950) and *Peter Pan* (1953). While reading the account of Benjamin's dogged faith in film and animation as socially 'healing representations' (p. 113) and in Disneyland as a 'restitutive utopia' (p. 112), inevitably looming in the background of any reader's mind will be the depressing knowledge that of course it was Adorno who would be proved right in his dark suspicion of Disney. As the pair disputed Disney's radical potential for social transformation, Disney appeared to answer them back when in 1938 it produced *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, a film that 'lead a fight against flatness' (p. 121) and 'reinstitute(d) the laws of perspective and gravity' (p. 149) to the extent that its animators had apparently fretted over a scene in which Snow White falls because they worried that the height and length of the drop might suggest she had fallen to her death. By the time Benjamin dropped Disneyland, however, it was already dead to modernism.

Though the age difference between the two men was barely more than a decade, Leslie's characterization of their tussle over Disney's meaning at times casts Benjamin as the sentimental father possessed of a severe and disapproving son who feels forced to curb the potential embarrassment caused by the older man's hopeful whimsy. It becomes all the more moving, therefore, that the book should end with the words of an older, more expectant, Adorno, writing six or seven years after Benjamin's death in *Minima Moralia* in terms that, Leslie argues,

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'ventriloquized dead Walter Benjamin's revolutionary dialect of redemption' (pp. 299-300). Thus, although Adorno does not evoke Benjamin through direct quotation, his belief in a positive and genuinely illuminating (though distorting) modernist art practice speaks through Benjamin in his call for the fashioning of perspectives through arts 'that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, and indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light' (p. 300). Ironically, by this stage – indeed even by the late 1930s – Disney Studios, whose early promise is convincingly outlined in the book, had already evolved (but for Adorno regressed) from a source of films not just for children but for 'anarchists of any age' (p. 30), to the inventor of the Mickey Mouse Club, where 'children learnt how to cross the street, wash behind their ears and respect their elders' (p. 31). Though the book's focus of interest terminates soon after World War II, its forward-looking ending offers many questions and connections to be picked up in subsequent work about where the signs and seeds of early animation's aesthetics of flat chaos can be discerned in postwar work outside the Disney Studios.

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Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004, 361 pp.

MATTHEW SOLOMON

The second decade of cinema history was marked by a great many changes that altogether reshaped the form, length, and mode of address of motion pictures, resulting in new types of films, new sites for film exhibition and new audiences for films. Story films became increasingly prominent within film programmes, marginalizing actualities and other kinds of non-narrative films that had been the mainstay of production and exhibition. In the USA, low-priced storefront theatres became the primary venues for moving picture shows, largely supplanting small-time and big-time vaudeville theatres as the place where most people would have seen movies. While the nickelodeon boom transformed cinema from an entertaining novelty to a permanent feature of the US cultural landscape, it also fueled a growing perception that motion pictures posed an imminent threat to the morality – if not the social and physical well-being – of the masses. Such concerns precipitated an intense and widespread clampdown on cinema that is the subject of Lee Grieveson's instructive book *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America*.

Censorship, Grieveson emphasizes, was but one notable facet of an extremely powerful 'regulatory response to cinema' (p. 4) between 1905 and 1915. The 'policing' of cinema was carried out not only by censor boards vested with the power to alter or suppress films, but also – as Grieveson demonstrates with considerable original research – by US governmental authorities that passed legislation and adjudicated cases dictating the ways films could be regulated. The book is a thoroughly documented and persuasively argued contribution to the growing

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literature on the 'so-called "transitional period"' (p. 4) of cinema that promises to reframe our understanding of this crucial juncture in film history. By tracing the ways that the very meaning of cinema was determined by its implication in the social issues of the Progressive Era, Grieveson indicates that the regulation of cinema should be acknowledged as among the most significant transformations of early US cinema.

In 1907, the *Chicago Tribune* spearheaded a vigorous campaign against nickel theatres. The newspaper inveighed: 'The outlaw life they portray in their cheap plays lends to the encouragement of wickedness. They manufacture criminals to the city streets' (quoted on p. 59). On Christmas eve of the following year, New York mayor George McClellan responded to similar criticisms by infamously shutting down all of the nickelodeons in the city – some 550 in all – after outspoken social reformers at a public meeting had 'condemned the nickel theatre as a moral sinkhole and a physical deathtrap' (quoted on p. 78). Though most of the theatres would quickly reopen, the New York Board of Censorship – later renamed the National Board of Censorship and subsequently the National Board of Review – was formed a few months later with the cooperation of film exhibitors as a more sustained and organized means of addressing what was termed 'the motion picture problem'.[1] Throughout the 1910s, the work of the National Board of Censorship was paralleled by the activities of other municipal and state censors (who included the police, clergy and other citizenry), which were responsible for determining and applying local standards to films that were to be screened in their respective areas.

The National Board of Censorship was the culmination of a shift in strategies for regulating cinema that transferred the locus of civic and police intervention from sites of film exhibition to transfer points along networks of film distribution. It also represented a conceptual change in the way that those with power framed and responded to 'the motion picture problem'. Grieveson argues:

> Regulation consequently concentrated in the main on the cultural control of cinema, on what could be shown, and on how cinema should function in the social body, rather than the political control of who could show moving pictures and when and where they could be shown. This development signaled in broad terms a shift from a regulatory focus on buildings and space to a focus both on the social function of cinema characteristic of the transitional era and on representations and effects that have subsequently dominated policy discussions of cinema. (p. 23)

Although cinema remained suspect for most upper-class reformers and their cohorts, allegations of obscenity and immorality were directed more and more at specific films instead of cinema as a whole. 'Emerging ... in 1907', Grieveson explains, 'is ... a shift from a literal policing of the cinema ... to a metaphorical policing that emerged in censorship

1   'The National Board of Censorship', *Nickelodeon*, vol. 2, no. 6 (1909), p. 182.

institutions and self-regulatory strategies' (p. 72). The emergence of film censorship between 1907 and 1909 coincided with the film industry's efforts to sell movies to middle-class audiences, in part, by internalizing guidelines promulgated by reformers. Although previous histories of the period have discussed censorship and the film industry's drive towards cultural respectability, few have done so with the rich detail or the penetrating abstractions found in *Policing Cinema*.

Additionally, the book extends existing accounts through a compelling focus on the law, gender and race. Among the book's strengths are its attention to a more broadly conceived idea of regulation that considers the ways in which local, state and federal governments 'identified [cinema] as a problem of governance' (p. 66) and its interrogation of the ideas about masculinity and blackness embedded in the criticisms that cultural arbiters levelled at cinema. These strengths come together perhaps most effectively in chapter four, which is about the regulation of boxing films and, in particular, the films of legendary African-American heavyweight Jack Johnson's championship fights. With the film *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* (1910), footage of Johnson knocking out the 'Great White Hope' (the formerly undefeated Jim Jeffries) could be seen across the USA, although prizefighting itself was prohibited in most states. The film was banned in many places and ultimately restricted by an act of Congress, the 1912 Sims Act, which was drafted and passed into law as a direct result of Johnson's fight films. The Sims Act categorized films as a form of commerce, 'differentiating cinema from the press (and from literature and art) and bringing it together with lumber, cheese, diseased cattle, and turpentine' (p. 149), thus authorizing the federal government to prevent the movement of films across the borders of the nation and individual states. Grieveson highlights the Sims Act as 'a crucial but still largely unexplored moment in the history of the federal government's intervention into the policing of cinema' (p. 132), describing it as a crucial turning point in the legal status of cinema and an important forerunner to the landmark 1915 Supreme Court decision in the Mutual case, which affirmed censorship by denying films the same 'free speech' protections afforded to the press.

Policing Cinema is structured by analyses of a handful of fiction films, several of which may already be familiar to readers interested in early cinema. Successive chapters contain useful readings of *The Unwritten Law* (1907), a sensational dramatization of the Thaw-White scandal, *A Drunkard's Reformation* (1909), a temperance film directed by D.W. Griffith, *Traffic in Souls* (1913) and *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* (1913), two early feature films that were part of a cycle of 'white slavery' films. Grieveson reads these films not so much as representative examples of the period's cinema, but rather as components of larger discursive formations on the regulation of cinema. Thus, chapter two demonstrates the ways that *The Unwritten Law* engages with the purported susceptibility of women and children that was foregrounded in criticisms of the cinema. Not unlike Stanford White, who seduced chorus

girl Evelyn Nesbit (and would later be killed by her future husband Harry Thaw), cinema was itself constructed as a threat to young females in the audience: 'In this way those schoolgirls and young working women watching and re-watching the textualization of the Thaw-White scandal were inscribed into a narrative of sexual danger similar to that visible on the screen and in the initial scandal' (p. 60). Similarly, chapter three shows how *A Drunkard's Reformation* – a film that was praised by the New York Board of Censorship – is part of the discourse by reformers and some in the film industry that promoted the nickel theatre as a family-friendly alternative to the saloon for the working classes. 'Rhetoric about cinema as a safe, family space, opposed to the homosocial space of the saloon' (p. 90), as Grieveson suggests, dovetails with this story of a father who stops drinking after he sees a stage play that enacts the decline and violent death of an alcoholic.

Policing Cinema is the summation of an extremely impressive body of research. The notes and bibliography, which comprise about one-third of the book's length, give ample indication of the author's sustained engagement with a large volume of primary source material and his familiarity with key works in US social and cultural history. The text is dense with quotations from local newspapers, the film industry trade press, censor boards and court cases, all of which add texture and specificity to the book's argument. Grieveson draws much from New York and Chicago newspapers that helps to detail developments in the two largest markets for films in the USA, while reading early film industry trade journals like *Nickelodeon* – later, *Motography* – and *Moving Picture World* as part of the discourse of regulation, since these publications were strong advocates for uplifting cinema. The book interprets numerous archival documents generated by censor boards and the court systems, shedding considerable new light on how censors, together with the law, dealt with the 'motion picture problem'. The author's examination of court and congressional records is one of the more notable and original features of the book; it is used to great effect to clarify the manifold roles of the US government in regulating the early cinema. With Grieveson's project of mapping a broad context of regulation come a number of interesting detours that discuss (among other things) the histories of juvenile delinquency, blue laws, temperance dramas and attitudes towards venereal disease.

While informed by recent scholarship in film history, the book's approach also owes much to revisionist histories of the Production Code era. By attending not only to censorship but also to the specific cultural concerns that underwrote censorship, Grieveson follows scholars like Richard Maltby and Lea Jacobs, who write:

> There is little evidence that there was, between 1930 and 1934, any widespread concern *among moviegoers* about the moral quality of the entertainment they consumed in the early 1930s; there is, however, a good deal of evidence of concern *about moviegoing* in the period. The

2 Lea Jacobs and Richard Maltby,
   'Rethinking the Production Code',
   *Quarterly Review of Film and
   Video*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1995), p. 2.

protest against movies . . . was an expression of anxiety about shifts in cultural authority, manifesting itself in a concern about youth and authority – a moral panic. The important historiographical point is that between 1930 and 1934, movie content was the site of this public anxiety, this moral panic, rather than the cause of it.[2]

Examining an earlier period in US history, Grieveson identifies a corresponding 'moral panic' (the phrase recurs throughout the book), one that centred on the suggestibility of the masses and the need to regulate spectatorship through categories of race and gender.

The powerful regulatory pressures exerted on the incipient medium, Grieveson argues, resulted in nothing short of a new definition for the cinema – in both cultural and legal terms – as 'harmless entertainment'. Echoing Maltby's suggestive description of Hollywood cinema,[3] Grieveson contends: 'The validation of "harmless entertainment" became the central strategy of the film industry's self-regulation' (p. 213). Ultimately, *Policing Cinema* places the 'regulatory response to cinema' at the very centre of the formation of 'classical Hollywood cinema'. In effect, the book asserts that what Maltby describes as the Hollywood 'ideology of consensus' was fundamentally negotiated at the time of the Motion Picture Patents Company – years before Hollywood was established as the effective centre of world film production. Yet, the 'path to Hollywood' was not a smooth one, *Policing Cinema* reveals, since it was paved through some highly contested areas of cultural terrain during the early twentieth century.

3 Richard Maltby, *Harmless
   Entertainment: Hollywood and the
   Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen,
   NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983).

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Francis Bonner, *Ordinary Television*. London, California and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003, 229 pp.

VICKY BALL

1 Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (London: Arnold, 1998).

Ordinary Television responds to the call in Television Studies in recent years to develop frameworks through which different sorts of television texts, particularly those that have been undervalued critically, can be discussed and evaluated. Like texts such as *The Television Studies Book* (1998)[1] before it, *Ordinary Television* places this need to evaluate televisual texts in light of shifts within broadcasting in recent years.

The 'ordinary' television to which the title of Bonner's book refers, then, is the game, lifestyle, chat, talk, reality, clip, magazine and the real-life law and order programmes which Bonner perceives have been neglected, precisely because of their unremarkable status as ordinary, everyday programmes, in favour of 'certain other areas of output – news and current affairs, drama and children's programmes' (p. 1). Focusing on examples from Australian and British 'free-to-air' broadcast television (p. 6) between 1986 and 2001, Bonner provides a great service to the field in producing a detailed and insightful evaluation of the proliferation of 'ordinary television' to illustrate its significance in light of changes to broadcasting in recent years, particularly through its use of everyday life as its subject matter within national and global contexts.

Whilst acknowledging and mapping the forerunners of these types of texts in light entertainment, Bonner moves away from the concept of genre as limiting the way commonalities across this disparate set of texts can be mapped. Instead the umbrella term 'ordinary television', is used to refer to the above set of texts and its use of everyday life for its subject matter, as a cheap and profitable programming solution within an increasingly competitive marketplace.

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2 Bonner is here referring to Norman Fairclough's description of 'conversationalization' in Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

3 Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

The textual characteristics of ordinary television are outlined in chapter two. Bonner states that ordinary television requires the similarities between the worlds of the programme and the viewer to be stressed, and three aspects of television contribute to their appeal to ordinariness. First, there is the mundaneness of its concerns, such as infotainment's focus on the domestic through its concentration on home, garden, food and clothing. Second, there is the style of its presentation, that usually takes place in a television studio which mimics the domestic setting or on location in the homes of ordinary people, as well as the move to a more informal mode of address by the presenters, that of conversationalization,[2] to fulfil what Paddy Scannell describes as 'sociability' (p. 50).[3] Third, as well as presenters themselves becoming more informal and thus appearing more 'ordinary', there are more ordinary people present, not only as contestants but at the very least as members of the audience – 'they are free set-dressing, free talent, eager to appear' (p. 52). Bonner estimates that ordinary television relies on a quarter of a million people every year in Britain for studio audiences. A further chapter explores more fully how the television personalities, the presenters, reporters and personnel, the ordinary participants but also the groups that seem to represent extra-ordinariness – the celebrity/expert – are normalized and are constructed as ordinary by television. Significantly, Bonner states that ordinariness is constructed through the tendency to construct comparatively homogeneous groups from its participants and personnel, 'or at the very least to segregate those whose accents or behaviour signal class too clearly, so that issues of class (and race) are rendered invisible' to the viewing public (p. 51).

Despite the considerable range of programmes that constitute ordinary television, Bonner argues that there is a surprising lack of 'discursive diversity' across these texts, arguing instead that a 'relatively small number of discourses and discursive positions recur' (p. 98). The main variation is age-based, with reality game shows in particular appealing to younger viewers, offering different positions from the more traditional texts such as gameshows or more recent lifestyle programmes. Chapter four is concerned with the discourses that pervade ordinary television – consumption, family, health, leisure and sexuality – that are articulated in relation to one another and are also tightly articulated to the self and 'thus amenable to the overarching discourse which is about the power of television in the transformation of the self' (p. 98). Two central points follow on from this; firstly, that ordinary television presents itself as explicitly setting out to help people. Secondly, that by addressing our everydayness ordinary television may be drawn upon more than drama programmes in identity formation, thus indicating ways that we can improve 'the self', exemplified by the use of ordinary people in makeover programmes. The transformative power of television is no longer utilized in Reithian terms to create better educated, more informed, more 'cultured' people. Instead, by adopting a consumerist

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4 Andy Medhurst, 'Day for night', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 9, no. 6 (1999).

approach this kind of broadcasting takes on the task of guiding us in our quest for a better lifestyle, 'where fashionability is key' (p. 127).

Drawing on Medhurst's[4] work on the utopian aspects of lifestyling programmes in Britain in the 1990s ('just refurbish a chest of drawers today, renovate the spare room next month, buy a fountain for the front garden or plan the facelift, things will get better and television is there to help') (p. 130), Bonner argues that television fosters individualism and 'cocooning' through a conservative notion of transformation rather than collective political action in the transformation of everyday life. Although Bonner argues that the dominant discourses are harmonious 'on all matters other than those inflected by age bifurcation', she avoids a totalizing account of these discourses by discussing how education, economics, ethics, work/employment, law and order, race, and class have to varying extents been absent, disguised or quarantined in the movement away from 'inform, educate and entertain' and the expansion of ordinary television under the rubric of infotainment and entertainment (pp. 137–8). Education in particular is marked out as the principal victim of these shifts in relation to broadcasting policy in the 1990s. It is information as opposed to education that is given through the fact sheets and websites produced by shows such as ITV's *This Morning* or Channel 9's *Burke's Backyard*. In other instances the focus is upon instruction, teaching and training of the body, as in texts like *Stars in Your Eyes* and *Faking It*. However, Bonner suggests that there are still some texts that manage to combine education and entertainment without becoming too populist, such as Channel 4's *Time Team* and *The 1900s House* – the latter of which was also screened in Australia on SBS, a channel whose profile Bonner surmises 'is even more substantially educated middle class than it is for Channel 4' (p. 144). Throughout this account and elsewhere, Bonner's reference to Ellis's concept that television is marked by an obsessive 'working through',[5] underpins her argument. She therefore suggests that through the disparate flow of television's programmes, particular discourses are seen and understood primarily in accordance with a dominant consumerist viewpoint.

5 John Ellis, 'Television as working-through', in Jostein Gripsrud (ed.), *Television and Common Knowledge* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1999).

A particular strength of the book is the comparison of Australian with British texts, which makes strange that which we take for granted in ordinary television – the codes and conventions, their construction of what is considered ordinary and everyday. The examples Bonner draws on in *Ordinary Television* serve to illustrate the arbitrary nature of the construction of the everyday that is very much dependent upon national specificities. The final chapter of the book, 'The global and the national ordinary', argues against 'globalization of culture' theses, using as evidence the buying of formats rather than the exportation of programmes in their original form. She proceeds to examine the construction of national identity in two case studies: *The Antiques Roadshow* in Britain and *Burke's Backyard* in Australia. Although readers may be familiar with the majority of examples that are drawn on in earlier chapters, some illustration would have proved useful in this

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later chapter where these specific case studies of national television are given.

Overall, *Ordinary Television* makes a valuable contribution to this neglected area of television output by pulling together existing work and extending the analysis in terms of shifts in recent broadcasting and the resultant proliferation of infotainment. It is clearly written and well organized, and will no doubt be invaluable to students embarking on research in this area.